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ABSTRACT

A study investigated aspects of the problem of at-risk youth aged 9-15 in the public schools. Focuses were compulsory attendance education; school programs; demographics; developmental characteristics; patterns of behavior leading to academic success or failure; academic achievement; and school/community efforts. Evidence showed that compulsory education varied by state. Existing policy and practice emphasized a standardized curriculum that focused on promotion of college attendance. Disadvantaged youth lived in circumstances that tended to promote family histories of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. Research data indicated that the overall quality of the family's life-style best explained why some children succeeded in school. The circumstances for families of low achieving children was "depressing." At-risk students had an even lower level of academic achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics than the generally low level among youth in the United States. The usual approach taken by public schools to handle at-risk students was to reinforce the standard curriculum. Specific recommendations were restructuring public schools; implementing a differentiated public school curriculum; improving competencies in basic skills; providing occupation and career orientation programs; establishing networks of educational and social welfare programs; broadening job opportunities for disadvantaged youth; and promoting interest in lifelong learning among disadvantaged youth. (88 references and a glossary) (YLB)

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Removing the Stigma of Disadvantage: A Report on the Education and Employability of 9 to 15 Year Old Youth 'At Risk'

Charles Bruckerhoff

Research Report No. 88-09

May 1988

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Executive Summary

In the face of convincing evidence that significant numbers of youth, age 9 - 15, are "at risk" of leaving school early with underdeveloped competencies in basic academic and work related skills, inappropriate attitudes and perceptions for active and continuing participation in the occupations of a modern, technological society, family histories of life in conditions of poor physical health and social development, the National Commission for Employment Policy has conducted an investigation of disadvantaged youth.

It is the purpose of this report to describe and explain aspects of the problem in the public schools known as youth "at risk." In particular, this study has its focus on the characteristics of youth, between the ages of 9-15, who come from circumstances of economic and educational disadvantage and who have a tendency to develop perceptions and behaviors about schooling that lead them to leave school before completing requirements for a high school diploma. It is reasonable to assume that the failure of elementary and junior high school students to show satisfactory achievement in school subjects, particularly the basic subjects, will severely limit their opportunities for obtaining meaningful and productive employment during their adult lives.

This report examines the following issues and problems of youth "at risk" who are 9 - 15-years-old: compulsory attendance laws, education, and adulthood; school programs and education; demographics; developmental characteristics; patterns of behavior leading to academic success or failure; academic achievement; and school/community efforts and the "at risk" youth.

The results of this study corroborate findings reported elsewhere. There is a large population of dependent children, 9 - 15-years-old who come from circumstances in their homes that tend to have a negative influence on the children's performance in school. The achievement records of school age children nationally show that, whatever are the gains that have been made in recent decades, these gains do not substantiate the conclusion that sufficient progress has been made by the majority of disadvantaged children. Most educational programs that operate for the purpose of dealing with youth "at risk" are based upon long-standing policy and practice. It is too early to state with any assurance whether the effects of the newly re-instituted programs will have a substantive influence on the dropout problem.

This report recognizes as factual that the American school curriculum is a standardized curriculum and operates in routine ways at all grade levels and in most public schools. At the federal level there is some provision for direct assistance with the educational and welfare needs of disadvantaged youth. Policy and practice at the state level tends to reinforce established procedures for operation of schools. At the local level the work of educators is generally done in accordance with standard procedures. Many officials for the schools perceive themselves as instruments for carrying out the policies handed down from superordinates in the form of influential special interest groups, legislatures, and politicians seeking office

This report on the problem of youth "at risk," who are 9 - 15-years-old, makes the following recommendations for policy makers concerned about taking effective steps in the direction of providing the disadvantaged youth of this nation with a foundation in schooling that promotes a positive sense of self-worth, at least satisfactory levels of achievement in basic academic and occupational skills, and preparedness for active, meaningful, and productive involvement with the economic, political, and social aspects of adulthood in the twenty-first century.

- To restructure public elementary and secondary schools.

- To design and implement a differentiated public school curriculum.

- To improve competencies in basic skills.

- To provide occupation and career orientation programs in the schools.

- To establish networks of educational and social welfare programs.

- To broaden opportunities for disadvantaged youth to obtain regular jobs.

- To promote interest in lifelong learning among disadvantaged youth.

Based upon the evidence collected in this inquiry, the youth of this nation who are 9 - 15-years-old and are economically and educationally disadvantaged face a greater likelihood of becoming unemployable adults. Children who are 9 - 15-years-old are at a critical stage of development of fundamental attitudes of self and others in relation not only to academic study, but also to work and to recreation. Disadvantaged youth need coordinated programs of assistance which deal in substantive ways with their development of basic academic and occupational skills. The results reported here argue that many corrective measures are required now to help these youth to become employable, productive, and satisfied adult citizens of this nation.

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REMOVING THE STIGMA OF DISADVANTAGE: A REPORT ON THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY OF 9 - 15-YEAR-OLD YOUTH "AT RISK"

Introduction

The American society is undergoing a dramatic transformation that has serious implications for disadvantaged youth and the future of this nation. Among the most important changes are the following: the youth population of minorities is growing, a large middle aged group consists of people who are mostly white and middle class, the poorest members of this society are children with teenage mothers, the institutions that formerly supported the family in child rearing are no longer present, and the traditional family is less common.

These factors are contributing to results that account for important differences in the characteristics of today's youth and their prospects for employment in the future. In brief, minority and disadvantaged children experience serious difficulty with achievement in basic academic skills, the high school dropout rate is 50% in many urban school districts, high school dropouts have difficulty obtaining employment, and teenage members of minority groups receive low levels of experience with employment. Officials of the schools refer to these children loosely as youth "at risk."

Youth who are between the ages of 9 and 15 typically are in the process of leaving a stage of development that focused on concrete operational thinking and entering a stage of development wherein abstract reasoning becomes an important focus. Children at this age in school must depend upon the basic literacy skills introduced in the primary grades for exploring and extending the use of such skills in the further pursuit of academic and occupational interests. The important point for curriculum design and occupational training is that these children need to recognize the relevance of school work for personal involvement in academic, career, vocational and technical interests.

The 9 - 15-year-old disadvantaged youth constitute a particularly important target population. Many of today's disadvantaged youth are seriously "at risk" of becoming unemployable in the future because they possess inappropriate or negative attitudes and perceptions about themselves, schooling, and work. They also have unsatisfactory levels of achievement in basic academic and occupational skills. The youth "at risk," whose family circumstances include economic and educational disadvantage, face nearly unbeatable odds against showing satisfactory achievement of basic skills for academic study and pursuit of occupational or career interests.

It is common to think in terms of blaming these children for their failure to do well in school. Those who approach the problem from this perspective tend to believe that increased academic standards and enforcement of attendance policy will provide effective treatment. It is unpardonable in this nation for educators, government officials, and policy makers to overlook the real sources of these children's difficulties with achievement. Sociologists and educators have argued persuasively that the student's family background and socioeconomic level are correlates to school failure and drop out (Bennett, 1987). In more specific terms, the following are among the chief causes of school failure for disadvantaged children: physical and sexual abuse, parental neglect, family histories of alcoholism and drug abuse, extreme poverty and depression, and illiteracy in the home.

It is the thesis of this study that the incidence of youth "at risk" is attributable to a complex interplay of serious social, economic, and educational factors that have a lasting and, possibly, irremediable impact on the lives of children, particularly, those who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. Despite the depressing nature of this statement, if appropriate, corrective public policies are adopted now to improve the chances that youth "at risk" achieve competence in basic academic and occupational skills, the disadvantaged youth will possess the necessary attitudes and skills for participation in the work force of this nation.

The Social Factor

With respect to the social dimension of the life of 9 - 15-year-olds, these children must receive assistance with leaving the relative innocence of childhood for the trials commonly associated with adolescence. The successful transition of disadvantaged youth from childhood to adulthood, when they may lead successful, productive, and meaningful lives, depends to a great extent upon their having had meaningful and valued social experiences in the school and the community during this formative period (Coleman, 1987 and Elkind, 1984). Because the lives of these children are split between their homes and their schools, it is essential that the various employment and educational agencies of the local community cooperate in efforts to help the disadvantaged youth to develop attitudes, perceptions, and skills that represent acceptable social behavior.

The Economic Factor

The nature and extent of the participation of today's youth in the work force as adults will determine the state of our economy during the next century. In recent decades, developed countries, such as the United States, have begun to rely more and more on computers and robots for manual labor and to shift their economies from a heavily industrial base to an adaptable and diversified service base (Bell, 1976). This transformation in occupations has proven to be a source of confusion, frustration, and depression for some individuals and communities, states, and regions of the country.

In response to this change in the economy, many American communities are now much less labor intensive in their orientation and much more dependent upon service industries. The people who have suffered the greatest losses in this process of change have been those who lacked the attitudes and skills that would have enabled them to transfer easily to alternative occupations for sources of income. Thus, a person's competence in basic skills is a crucial determiner of success on the job and in conducting the job search.

There is an urgent need for intensive educational programing for disadvantaged youth aged 9 - 15, because a characteristic feature of youth "at risk" is that they lack basic competencies in academic and occupational skills.

It is reasonable to conclude that many disadvantaged youth will need assistance with identification of careers which are meaningful to them personally and productive for society. These youth "at risk" will also need help with development of competence in basic academic and occupational skills which support their performance in whatever work role they choose.

The Educational Factor

In regard to curriculum design for schooling, children of these ages are in the 4th through 9th grades. This is a critical period for disadvantaged youth because the transition to the middle school and junior high school from the primary school assumes a mastery of basic academic skills, such as reading and mathematics and basic occupational skills, such as manual dexterity and timing. Although research indicates that disadvantaged youth, as a group, have realized important gains in SAT scores in recent decades, these gains do not make up the difference still existing between their scores and the scores of advantaged children.

However, the curriculum of the school must concern itself with more than development of competence in basic academic skills. It is typical to view the kindergarten and primary grades (k - 3) as having a focus on development of basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Beginning with the fourth grade there is progressively more attention given to the various disciplines of thought, including language and literature, science, and social studies. It is at this time, also, that it is most appropriate for the school curriculum to introduce and develop, as an equally valuable area of emphasis, the career, vocational, and technical aspects of the curriculum. As a consequence, children can recognize the important role played by basic academic and occupational skills in their education, no matter whether they show a personal preference for academic study or for occupational interests.

In the past five years several reports have drawn attention to the role that schools play (albeit unintentionally) in contributing, directly and indirectly, to the high incidence of failure or dropout among educationally and economically disadvantaged youth (Ekstrom, 1986). Authorities for the school and education researchers point out that disciplinary problems and low grades or course failure have great explanatory power in reference to students dropping out of school. Reports by Ernest Boyer (1983), John Goodlad (1984), Dale Mann (1987), and Gary Wehlage (1986), for example, offer sufficient evidence to conclude that the problem of youth "at risk" results from the complex interplay of all three factors: the culture of the schools they attend, the curriculum of the schools, and the social and economic circumstances of their families.

The Long-Term and Immediate Concerns

The present report suggests that the federal government take action to adapt existing policy and to establish new policy and programs to assist the states in efforts to educate and train the economically and educationally disadvantaged youth between the ages of 9 and 15. The most prudent approach to resolution of this problem would be to form a national committee of representatives from the various agencies and institutions who are directly involved with youth. The purpose would be to charge this body of people with responsibility for reexamining the role of public schooling in our democracy, particularly, in reference to the dramatic transformations that are now occurring and will continue to occur in all aspects of life in the superindustrial age. That committee work must be done, but there is a prior concern which demands immediate attention: guaranteeing the employability of youth "at risk" today.

The disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15, are in serious need of help to lift themselves out of dysfunctional personal circumstances and lifetime prospects for unemployability. These youth have a limited competence with basic academic skills, higher order thinking and problem solving strategies, and occupational skills. This combination of deficiencies means they will have personal histories of failure in school and work, unless appropriate corrective measures are taken soon.

It is important to expose this crisis among youth "at risk" because the inquiry raises legitimate concerns about the manner in which our society should deal with insuring the cultivation of personal welfare and development of basic skills among all youth, but especially the disadvantaged. The plight of disadvantaged youth calls attention to the economic and political welfare of this nation, because its continuance depends upon having a society made up of satisfied, skilled, and committed workers. To meet this challenge, public policy must place the needs of disadvantaged youth "at risk," age 9 - 15, high on the agenda of national priorities.

This is a report of research that investigates the process of education as it influences and is influenced by the emerging crisis among educationally and economically disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15, particularly in regard to their educational experiences in the middle school and junior high school years. In the conduct of this inquiry, the researcher focused first on the general divisions mentioned above: social, economic, and educational concerns relevant to youth "at risk." As the investigation continued, the researcher subdivided the problem into a number of categories that were useful for analysis and explanation of the results. These subdivisions, then, became the various sections of the report.

In the order of their appearance the sections are: compulsory attendance laws, education, and adulthood; school programs and education; demographic characteristics; developmental characteristics of 9 - 15-year-old children; patterns of behavior leading to academic success or failure; academic achievement; and school/community efforts and the "at risk" student. This report concludes with a summary of the findings and a set of recommendations. An appendix offers the reader definitions of terms that are more or less specific to this interest in "at risk" youth.

Compulsory Attendance Laws, Right to Education, and Adulthood

An interest in reform of the public schools on behalf of disadvantaged youth must take into consideration treatment of the legal justification for the programs that exist presently. A radical reform movement might advocate a complete overthrow of the legal basis for public schooling. The researcher rejects this view as an ahistorical and unworkable approach. Instead, the review to follow presents an argument for maintenance of the laws that presently provide for free and public schooling in the United States. Clearly, as a result of the laws on record, the youth of this nation have realized great benefits--both personal and social--from the public education program.

These gains notwithstanding, there is an urgent need for reform of public education. This report presents sufficient evidence to indicate that the life circumstances of disadvantaged youth, between the ages of 9 and 15, make them seriously "at risk" of dropping out of school. The causes and correlates of dropout are located both within and outside of the public schools. Because a high school level of proficiency with basic academic and occupational skills is essential for active and continuing participation in the work force, those youth who fail to meet the requirements for graduation become likely candidates for cyclical unemployment in their adulthood.

More specifically, there is need of new policy statements and new resources to support the education of disadvantaged youth. There is need of support for educators to design different public schools in areas of critical need. Schools for disadvantaged youth need innovative, flexible curriculum plans and organizational structures that include networks of supporting agencies. There is a need for schools that guarantee at least minimum levels of achievement in basic academic and occupational skills to target populations of youth "at risk," such as the 9 - 15-year-old group.

For this change in the public schools, it is essential that there be a major adjustment in the public policies governing the financing and management of public elementary and secondary schools. In short, this nation must view its efforts at substantive reform of the public schools on behalf of youth "at risk" as contingent upon the provision of choice to parents of school age children. The use of a voucher system is one means that would allow concerned parents, interested community members, and professional educators to cooperate in the process of creating and maintaining nonconsolidated public schools for the genuine educational welfare of all youth, but especially those who are disadvantaged.

Of Laws and Rights

The compulsory school attendance laws provide an important legal basis for public schooling. These laws have their origin in the common law, called parens patriae, which means that the state is responsible for the minors and others living within its boundaries to insure the preservation and protection of the "health, patriotism, morality, efficiency, industry, and integrity of its citizenship" (Alexander, 1984, p. 13). In the event that a parent's prerogatives are proven to be detrimental to the child, parens patriae gives to the states the power to override the custodial authority of parents in regard to the care of their children. As we shall see shortly, the states, with few exceptions, have exercised their authority in regard to the provision of public education to youth from a narrow and restricted, legal perspective.

The first compulsory school attendance law established in the United States was passed by the colony of Massachusetts in 1642. Little progress of a legal sort was made elsewhere during the colonial and post-colonial periods, until the onset of the free public school movement. The free school movement occurred between 1820 through 1850. In 1852, the State of Massachusetts led the nation again in enactment of compulsory school attendance legislation. By 1900 a majority of states and territories had passed similar legislation. By 1929 all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico had enacted compulsory school attendance legislation (Steinhilber and Sokolowski, 1966).

Table 88.—Ages for compulsory school attendance, by State: 1985

State	Compulsory attendance	State	Compulsory attendance
1	2	1	2
Alabama	7 to 16	Missouri	7 to 16
Alaska	7 to 16	Montana[2]	7 to 16
Arizona	8 to 16	Nebraska	7 to 16
Arkansas	7 to 17	Nevada	7 to 17
California	6 to 16	New Hampshire	6 to 16
Colorado	7 to 16	New Jersey	6 to 16
Connecticut	7 to 16	New Mexico	6 to 16
Delaware	5 to 16	New York[3]	6 to 16
District of Columbia	7 to 17	North Carolina	7 to 16
Florida	6 to 16	North Dakota	7 to 16
Georgia	7 to 16	Ohio	6 to 18
Hawaii	6 to 18	Oklahoma	7 to 18
Idaho	7 to 16	Oregon	7 to 18
Illinois	7 to 16	Pennsylvania	8 to 17
Indiana	7 to 16	Rhode Island	7 to 16
Iowa	7 to 16	South Carolina[4]	5 to 17
Kansas	7 to 16	South Dakota[2]	7 to 16
Kentucky[1]	6 to 18	Tennessee	7 to 17
Louisiana	7 to 16	Texas[5]	7 to 16
Maine	7 to 17	Utah	6 to 18
Maryland	6 to 16	Vermont	7 to 16
Massachusetts	6 to 16	Virginia	5 to 17
Michigan	6 to 16	Washington	8 to 18
Minnesota	7 to 16	West Virginia	6 to 16
Mississippi	6 to 14	Wisconsin[6]	6 to 18
		Wyoming	7 to 16

[1] Must have parental signature for leaving school between ages of 16 and 18

[2] May leave after completion of eight grade

[3] The ages are 6 to 17 for New York City and Buffalo

[4] Permits parental waiver of kindergarten at age 5

[5] Must complete academic year in which 16th birthday occurs

[6] Law specifies 6 to 18 unless excused or graduated

SOURCE Education Commission of the States "Compulsory School Age Requirements November 1985" (This table was prepared June 1986.)

The passage of a compulsory school attendance law by a state, established the provision for a free, public school education for youth. Although the process of enactment within the states occurred over a relatively short time (approximately 75 years), there were problems (Morison, 1965). Most notable were disagreements over who was eligible. In this early period of initial enactment, the controversy centered on enrollment of women and minorities, especially Black youth (Kaestle, 1983). The federal government settled this issue by including education within the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution, in the famous case of Brown v. Board of Education (1954). Eventually, the federal government exercised its right to protect all citizens from discriminatory practice, with passage of the landmark legislation, known as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-352). This law gave authorization to the Commissioner of Education to provide support for institutions of higher education and school districts in their efforts to deal with desegregation.

The ages of compulsory school attendance vary from state to state. The most notable deviations concern Mississippi, which has 14 years as the earliest leaving date and Delaware, South Carolina, and Virginia, which have 5 years as the earliest starting date. A summary of the national picture follows. The minimum age at which a child is required to attend school under the provisions of compulsory attendance laws in the nation is 5 years in 3 states, 6 in 16 states, 7 in 29 states, and 8 in 3 states. The maximum age for leaving school legally is 14 in 1 state, 16 in 34 states, 17 in 8 states, and 18 in 8 states. The age range that occurs most often in the states compulsory attendance laws is 7 to 16 years and is established in 17 states.

Table 89.—Average number of days per school year, classes per day, hours of class per day, and minutes per class in public high schools, by selected school characteristics: United States, 1984-85

School characteristic	Days per school year	Classes per day	Hours of class per day	Minutes per class
1	2	3	4	5
United States average	**178.0**	**6.1**	**5.14**	**51.1**
District size				
Small	177.5	6.1	5.22	51.1
Medium	179.0	5.8	4.92	51.0
Large	179.1	5.9	5.19	50.9
Community type				
Urban	179.0	5.9	4.98	51.2
Suburban	179.0	5.9	4.92	49.7
Rural	177.4	6.1	5.26	51.8
Region				
North Atlantic	180.2	6.0	4.45	44.8
Great Lakes and Plains	177.8	6.0	5.10	51.2
Southeast	177.9	5.8	5.33	54.9
West and Southwest	178.7	6.3	5.61	53.2

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Survey of School Districts on Academic Requirements/Initiatives." (This table was prepared June 1986.)

The Child Labor laws were established at about the same time as the School Census Laws and both influenced in important ways the enrollment of youth in public schools. When the United States Census Bureau reported in 1920, that approximately 1 million children between the ages of 10 and 15 were working at regular jobs, it generated an organized effort by parents and teachers to press state legislatures for laws to protect children from the dangers of early and hazardous employment (Steinhilber and Sokolowski, 1966, p. 3). In order to enforce the Child Labor Laws, these groups also pressed state legislatures to require that authorities for the public schools keep an accounting of daily attendance. Enrollment records could be checked to find out how many children were not in school (Kotin and Aikman, 1980, p. 32). The combined effect of these two measures resulted in a dramatic increase in public school enrollment in 1920 (a 100 percent increase for high school enrollment alone) and continues today (Digest of Education Statistics, p. 12).

An important point about compulsory school attendance is that in all states, except California, the term "compulsory education" does not occur in the legislation that requires children to attend school (Kotin and Aikman, 1980, p. 71). The authorities for the school and the government of the state are bound legally only to show proof that school age students are attending school for a specified number of days per year, classes per day, hours and minutes of class per day. The specific figures for attendance vary only slightly from state to state. The average for the United States is as follows: 178.0 days per school year, 6.1 classes per day, 5.14 hours of class per day, and 51.1 minutes per class (Digest of Education Statistics, 1987, p. 101). These points about attendance as the legal foundation of schooling suggest that there is need of policy to encourage public schools to go beyond the mere accounting for attendance as an indicator of success with public education. Officials for the schools need to demonstrate the effectiveness of instructional programs for the education of disadvantaged youth.

This discussion of the legal bases for public schooling shows that the states and the federal government have exercised their authority historically in regard to the education of youth. The determination of who is eligible and for what kind of educational services continues as an issue today. Examples of recent federal legislation that have had an important impact on the provision of free, public schooling in the states include Education of the Handicapped Act (PL 94-142) and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (PL 98-524). Each of these laws made provision of federal assistance available to the states for particular educational needs and interests of citizens.

The compulsory school attendance laws, child labor laws, and school attendance laws require that children receive an education between certain ages, provide fines and penalties for the failure of parents and guardians to comply, and establish minimum ages for children to enter the work force. There are many variations in the specific details of the states' laws. Also, there are numerous, specific state laws dealing with curriculum content, textbooks, and so on (See Kotin and Aikman, 1980). It is important to note, however, that the state's power is limited, in that it has the legal authority to require that a child be schooled, but not necessarily at public expense and not necessarily in a public school (Alexander and Alexander, 1984, p. 14). The simple prerogative of every parent, then, is to decide whether to have the child educated at public expense in a public school or in some other, legitimate, educational program.

Hence, parents have the choice to send their children to "private school" and places of instruction classified as "elsewhere" and "otherwise" (Kotin and Aikman, 1980, p. 167). In recent decades many parents have chosen to educate their children in their homes. Many states have complied with their wishes, requiring application as "private" schools," appropriate certification of the teacher or tutor, suitable curriculum, and an adequate number of hours for instruction over the term. However, home instruction is "not, generally, considered to fulfill the requirements of compulsory school attendance" (Alexander and Alexander, p. 16). Parents who wish to provide home instruction to their children, must apply for an exemption form the compulsory attendance law.

To some extent these actions on the part of parents are explained by dissatisfaction with the public schools. Just what the nature of the parents' dissatisfaction amounts to is an open question. We may assume, though, that some of this rejection of public schools is a consequence of the generally low public opinion of the free schools (Digest of Education Statistics, 1987, p. 23). Other reasons may include the following: particular religious preference, flight from urban desegregation programs, and survivalism.

Of particular importance for this discussion is the concern for provision of a high quality public education program to disadvantaged youth in such a manner as to avoid discriminatory practice, whether intentional or unintentional. To explain briefly, a policy change suggested in this report would encourage educators--both professional teachers and administrators--to open public schools that offered different designs for schooling in terms of innovative structural, organizational, and curriculum features. The intent would be to place most of the emphasis for educational reform on behalf of disadvantaged youth in the place where the most work is to be accomplished--between teacher and student. However, without appropriate safeguards, this proposal, accompanied by the voucher system, could easily become a public support system for private and parochial schools or, to be avoided at all costs, segregationist public schools. In the interests of separation of church and state and provision of equal rights, each of these results must be avoided.

In the continuing effort of this nation to provide a free public education that promotes further realization of democratic ideals, the voucher plan strikes this reviewer as one means, among many possible alternatives, for effective work at the grass roots. The education of disadvantaged youth can focus on development of competence in basic academic and occupational skills. Urban and rural schools can make advanced studies in academic subjects available without restrictions to all youth. Teachers can encourage individual students to pursue a career or vocational/technical interest without sacrificing time needed for academic study. The new public schools can contribute to development of respect and appreciation, nationwide, for the positive ramifications of pluralism in American culture.

In sum, two points are important in reference to the provisions of state laws dealing with compulsory attendance. One is that where the student lives makes some difference in the maximum number of years that one must be enrolled in some kind of formal schooling. In some states this number may be 18 years. In other states the total number of years required is 17 or 16 years. In the state of Mississippi it is 14 years. The other point is that in states where the maximum number of years required is less than it would ordinarily take a youth to complete school, there is no official recognition of accomplishment other than the high school diploma. In other words, if the student chooses to leave school at the age when it is legal to do so, the state makes no certificate available to the student that authenticates that individual's academic accomplishments.

That states differ in regard to the number of years of schooling required for the youth of this nation and do not recognize in a formal way their work in school, suggests that there is something lurking beneath the surface of compulsory education laws. As Kotin and Aikman (1980, p. 71) note, the primary concern with compulsory school attendance laws has been to provide proof of attendance. Public schools should provide assurance that all youth receive a good education at public expense.

There is another problem with the states' compulsory school attendance laws. In one state the law maintains that a person is "educated" at age 16. In another state the law requires that one be in school until turning 18 years old. Whether one stays in school until age 18 or leaves early at age 16, a high school diploma or its equivalent is either useful or necessary for entry into a variety of occupational or educational interests. However, the difference in legal ages for leaving schools, means that some disadvantaged youth will leave school early, legally, without receiving a diploma.

John Goodlad (1987) has questioned the "conventional wisdom" that dictates a student must remain in school until 18 and must receive the traditional high school diploma, with its implicit subscription to post-secondary education in colleges and universities. At the age of sixteen a young person has the legal right to hold jobs in certain sectors of the economy. Goodlad proposes that states allow schools to develop diversity in their curriculum. In this plan there would be a common core curriculum for all that would be completed by the time the child reaches age sixteen: twelve years of formal schooling, from 4 through 16 years.

According to Goodlad's plan, students who intend to pursue college studies, would continue with the college preparatory academic program offered in high schools. The students who do not choose to enter college, but prefer to enter a world of work where crafts and trades are practiced, would participate in a secondary school program that integrates the student's academic program with interests in crafts and trades. Completion of the common core curriculum for all of these students would assure the public that every child receives a good education at public expense. This researcher finds in the proposal from Goodlad a sound, basic plan for development of an innovative school curriculum to serve disadvantaged youth, between the ages of 9 - 15 years.

Public school officials should be encouraged to take the legal provisions of schooling beyond a concern for attendance. Disadvantaged youth must be held accountable for attending school for a minimum number of years and for receipt of a diploma that certifies competence as well as attendance. Officials of the schools need to be held accountable for providing educational programs that enable disadvantaged youth to achieve at least minimum levels of competence with the basic academic and occupational skills that are part of a core curriculum.

Influence of Existing Policy and Practice

The influence of existing policy and practice has been to promote continuance of established programs of education. The end result of such activity is that there is much redundancy and standardization in programs of education for disadvantaged youth who are "at risk" of dropping out of school (Buttenwieser, 1985). The proposals reviewed in this report serve as examples of how yet another wave of policy "changes" will maintain existing programs. It is worth inquiring into the merit of reinforcement of established policy and practice, if, under the existing circumstances, disadvantaged students choose to drop out of school or to adopt perceptions and behaviors between the ages of 9 and 15 years that put them "at risk" of leaving school early.

Those professionals who draft the proposals for new legislation, new policy statements, or new instructional programs must beware of an illusory feature of policy making known as creating "the emperor's new clothes." What is needed are proposals for policy and practice in education that not only deal effectively with the dropout problem, that is evidently in need of immediate attention, but also provide for development of innovative schools and curriculum designs that remove the school based causes and correlates of "at risk" youth in the first place.

The conclusion drawn is that support is lacking for truly innovative programs. Most existing forms of support reinforce established ways of providing educational services to youth who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. Policy and programs should be targeted specifically for treatment of disadvantaged youth "at risk," between the ages of 9 and 15. There is need of policy changes and provision of new resources that enable local officials of the public schools to deal in more effective ways with the education of disadvantaged youth, who are 9 - 15 years old.

School Programs and Education

Thus far the focus of this report has been on the legal basis for public schooling and the tendency for school officials to develop standard schools in response to the compulsory school attendance requirement. In the section that follows, there is a discussion of the school as an agency whose purpose is to educate youth, regardless of their social and economic circumstances. Given this interest, it is important to ask this question: Education for what?

Nearly one quarter of the students who enroll in the freshman class of high schools nationally, drop out of school before completing requirements for graduation. These results may be seen to support the contention that not all students who enter school are capable of doing satisfactory work in school. Implicitly, at least, the following assumption seems to be at work: the society may expect to have approximately 25 percent of its citizens incompetent with regard to the standard requirements of public school education. As Kliebard (1986, p. 15) notes, there is an interesting history of efforts to excuse the public school curriculum. Briefly, the school's attempts to develop a proper and rigorous education program are hampered by concern for students labeled as "garden variety of citizens" or "great army of incapables."

The education a student receives in school imparts more than knowledge and skill in courses of study like math, science, English, and so on. The school is a small community within which the very same forces unfold that affect the people in the larger society outside the school (Waller, 1932). The result in the school is a complex and necessary process of socialization for children. In other words, the school helps children to fit into their society. An important point is that the quality of the socialization process unfolding among youth in the schools may contribute to or detract from the progressive development of the society in their future. If the school's socialization process perpetuates the injustices and inequalities of the larger society, it fails in its attempt to educate youth for a better tomorrow.

Students who drop out of school may recognize the contradictions between the stated aims of the school and the effects. That is, disadvantaged students may see that the same, small group of advantaged students gets the few rewards offered by school. The response of the youth "at risk" may be to reject all that the school stands for. Similarly, students who choose not to receive a diploma may be viewed by the school or society as a collection of "misfits" or "incorrigible" types. Assuming that the school is an institution that plays an important role in the socialization of youth, roughly 25 percent of the population of the youth in the nation refuse to conform to the ordinary standards of belief and conduct. Their choice to drop out of school before receiving the school's seal of approval, signals their refusal (or at least resistance) to adopt the norms of their society.

In New York City, for instance, this translates into 39,040 "misfits" or "incorrigibles" who dropped out of secondary schools during the 1981 school year alone (See Hammack, 1987, pp. 10-11). This number becomes considerably larger when added to the number of students who drop out of school elsewhere in the state of New York and in the other fifty states of the Union.

For example, Cardinas (1986) projected that 86,000 students in the 1982-83 class of freshmen in the State of Texas would drop out of school. In this way, the 25 percent national dropout rate achieves a concreteness that makes it understandable when translated into raw numbers of individuals. Cardinas (1986), Catteral (1986), and Levin (1972) have used these numbers to calculate the costs to society for students dropping out of school in Texas, California, and in the nation, respectively. The United States can not afford to disregard the plight of disadvantaged youth "at risk." According to Patrick Calan (1987), the productivity of every citizen is much more important today than it ever has been because of the increasing age of the "majority" whites and the increasing numbers of youth in the "minority" populations. School programs are needed that develop the talent of all citizens of this nation.

It is neither reasonable nor correct to assume that there is something wrong with disadvantaged students who choose to leave school early. A number of authorities for the schools and education researchers argue that the policies and practices of the school and the formal organization of the school are important factors in a disadvantaged student's decision to quit school for good. A responsible effort to deal with the 9- 15-year-old "at risk" student must include an investigation of the extent to which schools cause capable students to drop out.

Specific Policy and Programs

The authors of The Way Out (1986, p. ii) "have consciously and explicitly rejected any notion that the problems in public education are the students themselves." The failing element in the program is not the student, but rather the design and purpose of the school system itself. The set of rules in existence promote a particular kind of school life, one that justifies a narrow set of values relevant to business, industry, and management and serves the singular goal of preparation for college.

In and of themselves, these goals and values are good, but when they are prescribed definitively for the treatment of all children, the policy and practice of education runs into conflict with basic principles of democratic life. The primary purpose of the school--to educate youth--has been replaced by a systematic program for sorting and slotting children.

It is possible that the youths who reject the school have a vague awareness that an implicit feature of the school's formal organization is a caricature of the formal organizational structures so typical of the world of work with which they are also familiar. In other words, these students may recognize in the life of the school the same features as are present in the work life of their parents. Knowledge of the literal meaning of rules and practices common to the work place may make the school less appealing to certain youth than administrators and teachers may care to admit.

Why wait until graduation to prove that one can start on time, stop on time, work at the correct pace, complete all assigned work, and so on? Also, for how long must one practice and in how many different variations before receiving certification as a "basics of work" laborer? Are thirteen years required? Finally, for how long can a student tolerate contradictions between stated policy and practice, particularly, when the student suffers personally from forms of discriminatory or unfair practice?

For disadvantaged students who do not aspire to go to college, the traditional school values, wrapped up as they are in the trappings of a defunct factory system, must appear as a charade. Monotony, ennui, and insult combine in the experience of too many youth "at risk" and encourage them to reject the very program designed to provide a release from a dependent or subservient role in society. The activities and exercises in the typical classroom would be so much monotonous detail to express and to evaluate a particular concern--one's subscription to the work ethic. To the youths who intend to go to college or who persevere, regardless of their aspirations, the system must appear to be a necessary evil--something to escape from upon graduation (Wehlage and Rutter, p. 389).

How much different it would be to go to school where the diverse values representative of American society manifest themselves as inherently good and non-competitive. A school system takes up a mission with a most serious challenge when it genuinely subscribes to democratic principles in this pluralistic culture. Whether in the name of progress, excellence, or defense, the schools of tomorrow can not afford to regress toward conceptions of teaching and learning relevant to bygone eras. Authorities for the school and policy makers can buy time, in the meanwhile, by tinkering with components and processes common to the prevailing, "one best" system. Eventually, the program for public schooling in America must take a form that demonstrates clearly the society's commitment to principles given in the nation's most cherished value: democracy.

By their own account, students leave school before receiving a diploma for two reasons: because they receive failure marks consistently in course work and because they do not like school (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986, p. 376). When students drop out of school, they search for satisfaction in the pursuits typical of adulthood: employment, marriage, and raising children. The headlines of big city newspapers have chronicled the disappointing results for these youth (Wendling, 1987). The implications are that the young person meets with failure and hardship in both spheres.

On the basis of their study of High School and Beyond data, Wehlage and Rutter (1986, p. 380) conclude that truancy, expectations, discipline problems, lateness, and hours worked are the important variables to explain the "at risk" student's low academic performance and eventual decision to drop out of school. A simplistic analysis of these results would lead one to conclude that there is need for a tightening of standards and an enforcement of existing school policy. Many school systems have dealt with the drop out problem in such a manner.

However, further analysis of the data led Wehlage and Rutter (1986, p. 381) to comment as follows: "It appears that rather than broadly promoting the realization of youthful expectations schools now work to undermine them, except for those students who are most obviously facile with a restricted conception of learning." From their perspective, the interaction that takes place between the formal organization of the school and the "at risk" student serves this implicit function: to cause certain students to drop out of school while, at the same time, promoting the academic welfare of others better suited to the interests of the school. The school's policy and the manner in which it is enforced by school officials, particularly in regard to discipline, are perceived by a broad range of students as ineffective and unfair. Blacks, Hispanics, Whites, college and non-college bound students give poor ratings to the school's discipline system. The schools seem to subscribe to an ethos more or less well suited to the group of students called college bound.

The findings of Wehlage and Rutter compliment in some ways the results of a study conducted by Wheelock, et al. (1986) titled, The Way Out, reporting on the Boston middle schools. Wheelock maintains that poor leadership, unfair and negligent attendance policies, and policies of non-promotion and suspension contribute directly to the high incidence of drop out in the Boston Public School System. These are school policies designed ostensibly for the purpose of assuring the public that students will be in school and, while there, will be participating in all of the activities planned for the day.

The authors of The Way Out make the following recommendations for reform of the Boston Middle Schools--a reform that would have a positive effect on the "at risk" student.

- Introduce substantive change in school policies and practices for promotion.
- Reform school conditions that make learning difficult for students and contribute to truancy.

How should school reform be done? Two standard approaches to dealing with problems of the schools are: reliance on short-term interventions and creating alternative schools. The authors of The Way Out denounce both as ineffective and as mere exercises in dodging the real problems of public school education in contemporary society.

Wheelock is in agreement with Wehlage and Rutter (1986, p. 388), who argue that schools push students to become dropouts. The 9 - 15-year-old youth "at risk" of dropping out of school will need help from specialists in education to achieve at higher levels in school. However, it is a mistake to focus on the educational needs of these children while avoiding a critical analysis of school policy and practice that cause these results in the first place. The efforts at remediating the student must go hand in hand with a thorough effort at remediating the school system itself.

In a particularly revealing statement, the authors of The Way Out declare that:

> Rules developed without input of students, teachers who misbehave by name-calling or using abusive language with students, administrators who yell at students, and staff who implement rules unfairly or inconsistently all contribute to student alienation. A curriculum that fails to challenge students and addresses students' developmental needs, sorting of students into separate classes for "nerds,"

> "repeaters," or "bad kids," teaching approaches that do not actively involve students, and unresolved tensions among staff can all provide fertile ground for student misbehavior that ultimately leads to suspension. (Wheelock, 1986, p. 6)

At first glance it may seem superficial to conclude that "the problems of the "at risk" student are everyone's problems." Too often people fail to recognize the pithy substance of common sense. The above quote from Wheelock demonstrates that everyone who comes to the school has a responsibility to promote learning among the disadvantaged students.

Teachers and administrators must look honestly at their practice of education in the schools and inquire about its implications for students. In some instances there is clearly no justification for the language used or the activity undertaken. Both contribute directly to the students' development of negative perceptions and beliefs about themselves as persons and as students. In other instances the rationale used in support of a tried and true method is insubstantial or wrong.

These researchers quoted above have shown the value of taking a common sense approach to the drop out problem. In doing so they have exposed the policy and practice of schooling for what it is, both explicitly and implicitly: masking of inappropriate, professional conduct and institutional bias against pluralism.

In the opinion of Wheelock (1986, p. 8), a modest beginning for the reform of the school would develop from the following four proposals:

- Create interdisciplinary teams of teachers, called clusters, houses, or schools-within-schools.
- Design an exploratory interdisciplinary curriculum relevant to the needs and interests of the particular age group to be served.
- Invent strategies for implementing flexible scheduling, so that teachers and students come together under appropriate circumstances for learning.
- Provide guidance counseling that respects the developmental stages and cultural backgrounds that are typical for the youth served

The suggestions listed above would enable a school to change its mode of operation with a minimum effort at reorganization. The consequences for teachers, administrators, and students would be participation in a modest conceptual and practical shift within the ordinary system of public schooling from maintenance of unfair and unreasonable practices to development of a responsive and systematic model for instructional programing.

Formal Organizational Structure

The effects of the school are attributable to the formal and informal organizational features of the school. Anthropologists and sociologists provide convincing evidence that the physical and mechanical aspects of an organization, like a school, exercise a controlling influence on the quality of life experienced by all who come together in that place (Homans, 1961; Kanter, 1977; LeMasters, 1975; Schrank, 1978; Terkel, 1974). The explicit features of a school--whether physical or operational--affect not only the quality of existing circumstances, but also the extent and nature of change that people envision, introduce, and support over time. An effort to improve the education and employability of 9 - 15-year-old disadvantaged youth must examine the ways in which the formal organizational structure of the school encourages these children to become "at risk" of dropping out of school.

The formal organizational structure of the school is the complex of explicit physical and procedural features within which and through which administrators, teachers, and students do the work of education. Included among the physical aspects are the architectural design, building materials, placement and location of buildings, and type and number faculty and staff positions.

The school's policy and curriculum guides serve as examples of formal, procedural structures. Included are the policies and practices established for operating the facility on a daily basis throughout the school year. There are policies regarding retention of students for failing to achieve at grade level, tardiness, cutting classes, and placement in advanced, remedial, general or special education tracks. Curriculum guides may suggest or require lessons and may include general and specific detail for the content of courses. In many instances the district purchases particular textbooks for teachers to use when presenting subject matter to students.

The informal organizational structure concerns the voluntary association of the different people of the organization. Through this complex social theater, people develop the relevant and characteristic perceptions and activities while interacting over time within the environment. In this manner, the cultural process unfolds in a school and a particular cultural knowledge emerges from the structural features of the building and the political forces operating among the educators and the people who make up the local community.

The conditions of schooling in high schools suggest that the domination of school policy by an interest in control of students influences in negative ways not only the behavior of students, but also the perceptions and activities of teachers and administrators. In a phrase, the total school curriculum. The demand for accountability from the schools in recent decades has led to the belief, on the part of the public and many educators, that behavioral theory (i.e., control) developed in psychology is the keystone for the educator's curriculum (Egan, 1983). The end result of the public's fascination with behavioral theory and the excessive push for accountability in schooling is that state legislatures have defined certain legal and pedagogical parameters of the school's curriculum in terms of control and predictability (See also Goodlad, 1984, pp. 274-275).

Some schools develop instructional programs that have exaggerated forms of control. It is typical to find representative examples of control-oriented schools in the urban centers where large numbers of disadvantaged youth are served. In contrast, administrators and teachers in some suburban schools, take risks with interpreting state guidelines because they are confident that their students will respond in positive ways to varied, flexible, and less predictable instructional programs. Generally speaking, schools that serve large populations of economically and educationally disadvantaged students tend to follow state guidelines literally and much more rigidly than schools that serve advantaged students.

Control dictates that one identify and rely upon explicit detail. In pursuit of this goal, educators in state departments of instruction require teachers and administrators to meet particular requirements for instructional programing. Public school administrators establish and maintain specific policy to govern the activities engaged in at all times by students and faculty. Curriculum directors identify behavioral objectives and select textbooks for teachers to use throughout the district when presenting subject matter. Teachers follow established guidelines for the conduct of classes and rely upon standard, routinized methods of teaching. Students attend classes regularly, complete assignments on time, and avoid engagement in disruptive behavior.

The concern for control of students' activity has led to a manifest belief in control of the curriculum. The result nationally has been mass production of a climate for schooling defined as narrow, rigid, and safe. For fear of loss of control, everyone exerts the minimum effort. It may come as a surprise to some people that this minimum is an inherent feature of explicit objectives. The low achievement results of many students are a reflection of the explicitly limited capability of the typical school curriculum to serve the varied needs and interests of the students.

How do we get beyond the systematic model for instructional programing and change in a substantive way the formal organizational structure of the school? There is a need for teachers to deal in more direct and effective ways with the needs of disadvantaged youth. In more specific terms, teachers and principals need to be empowered to propose innovative educational programs for disadvantaged youth. Also, to strengthen and, at the same time, to broaden and deepen the effect of public schooling in this nation, the parents of all school age children could be given vouchers which allow the parents to choose the public--and only public--school within their district for their child to attend. Provisions should be made available through the vouchers for children to receive any individual needs within the developmental program, whether special, remedial, or advanced.

Demographic Characteristics

The disadvantaged youth of this nation live in circumstances that tend to promote family histories of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. To report that children in this nation are economically and educationally disadvantaged, reveals nothing that is new, though. What is worthy of attention by public policy makers with a concern for the eventual employment of disadvantaged youth, are the specific factors of contemporary life in America that account for these children's failure to attain minimum levels of competency in basic academic and occupational skills. The employability of today's disadvantaged youth between the ages of 9 and 15 depends upon adoption of policy that recognizes and responds to the important changes occurring in the demographic characteristics of American society.

In the report of demographic characteristics to follow there is attention to the life styles of disadvantaged youth generally. It is logical to conclude that the circumstances of life are the same for a specific subgroup, like the 9 - 15-year-old target population for this report. The following factors are seen as having an important impact on the unemployability of disadvantaged youth: high birth rates among ethnic and racial minorities, different immigrant patterns, the changing character of the American family, and the high incidence of teenage pregnancy and illegitimate birth. First, there is a discussion of characteristics which are common to disadvantaged youth.

Common Characteristics of Disadvantaged Youth

What are the characteristics of disadvantaged youth in the United States? In the May 14, 1986 edition of Education Week (p. 17) the editors included the following report:

> Next September, more than 3.6 million children will begin their formal schooling in the United States.
>
> - 1 out of 4 of them will be from families who live in poverty.
> - 14 percent will be the children of teenage mothers.
> - 15 percent will be physically or mentally handicapped.
> - As many as 15 percent will be immigrants who speak a language other than English.
> - 14 percent will be children of unmarried parents.
> - 40 percent will live in a broken home before they reach 18.
> - 10 percent will have poorly educated, even illiterate, parents.
> - Between one quarter and one third will be latchkey children with no one to greet them when they come home from school.
> - And a quarter or more of them will not finish school.

The above report places emphasis upon what educators and the general public consider to be serious problems for the schooling of all disadvantaged children in the United States through the next decade. For social, economic, and educational reasons, the 9 - 15-year-old disadvantaged youth constitute an important target population within this larger group.

According to a recent report from the Center for Education Statistics (1987, pp. 42-43), there are over 18 million, 9 - 15-year-old youth enrolled in grades 4 through 9, constituting approximately 46 percent of the total public elementary and secondary school enrollment. Given the descriptive statistics reported above for the general disadvantaged youth population, it is reasonable to conclude that significant numbers of the target population for this study are in need of assistance with development of academic and occupational skills.

Ethnic and Racial Diversity

A variety of sources offer evidence that this society is undergoing a dramatic ethnological change. The United States Census Bureau estimates (Education Week, 1986, p. 18) that the percentage of births of children of color has increased steadily from 1950 (14.4%) until 1982 (19.4%). Based upon these facts and other supporting evidence the Census Bureau projects that by the year 1990 births of children of color as a percentage of all births will increase to 20.1%. By the year 2030 the birth rate of children of color will be 24.7%. The reason why people of color will increase their percentage of births is simply that they have more people of child bearing age than do Whites.

These are obvious and important changes in the ethnic and racial composition of our society. It is a natural and important consequence of the immigration policies of this nation. We have created a pluralistic society and must provide opportunity for all people to work and to enjoy the benefits of their society. There will always be a serious need in our nation for employable adults with a strong commitment to the social responsibility for work. However, if significant numbers of the available adults do not possess at least the basic academic and occupational skills for success in the work force, they are incapable--as a result of institutional design and public policy--of becoming productive citizens.

Immigrant Populations

Two other factors that influence the demographic character of a society are the rate and origin of immigrants. There has been an increase in both legal and illegal immigrants in recent decades (Education Week, 1986, p. 18). Also, some important shifts have occurred in the ethnic and racial groups which constitute the immigrant population. Whereas most of the United States during the early part of this century were from eastern and western Europe, the top ten countries of origin for immigrants today include people from Asia, the Near East, and the Caribbean Islands.

Among these new immigrants, only a small number of people from the top ten countries of origin use English as a first language. Also, the majority of immigrants to this country today are people of color. Hence, the ethnic and cultural base of the United States is realizing an enrichment that is more varied than during any previous period in history. As a consequence of this immigration and naturalization policy, our nation is becoming a more pluralistic culture. From another standpoint, the population of the United States is, indeed, representative of the world and there are many (albeit unpredictable) possibilities for cultural development in our society during the next century.

Given the concern for public education of immigrant children, it is also important to note the particular places where the immigrant parents choose to resettle. Most of the legal immigrants are resettling in major cities along the east and west coasts (Education Week, May, 1986). The care and schooling of disadvantaged children, both of immigrant and indigenous parents becomes an important concern in the area with dense populations of immigrant people. Where the public schools have large enrollments of disadvantaged children, particularly from minority and immigrant groups, it is important that local agencies provide appropriate, comprehensive services to meet social and educational needs.

The Changing Character of the American Family

It is naive today to think about the American family in traditional terms: mother and father and two children, father absent from the home during the day for work, mother present in the home giving immediate care to the children until they have completed schooling, mother and father and children spending time together and with friends and relatives during evenings, weekends, and vacations. The definition and role of the family in this country are undergoing dramatic changes, leaving many children with few hints about appropriate sex role models, study and work habits, and occupational interests. In addition, teen-age pregnancy has reached epidemic proportions and the rate of illegitimate births has increased significantly.

To explain further, the United States Bureau of Census reports the following data regarding the living arrangements of mothers who have children under 18 years old (Education Week, 1986, p. 24). In the year 1984 the Bureau of Census reported that 20.4 percent of all children under the age of 18 were living with their mother only. This rate is up from an 18.0 percent for the year 1980 and 10.8 percent for 1970. A further breakdown of these data by race revealed important differences between groupings. Among White children the rate for living with their mother only was 15.1 percent. Among Black children the rate was 50.2 percent. The report stated that 24.9 percent of Hispanic children live with their mother only.

The results reported above indicate that significant numbers of children from racial groups other than white have only one parent in the home and that parent is usually their mother. To state the matter differently, while 74.9 percent of White children grow up in households where both parents are present, only 41.0 percent of Black children and 70.2 percent of Hispanic children receive parental care from their mother and father.

These results show that significant numbers of tomorrow's adult male population will have grown up in households with little or no influence during the formative years from an adult, same sex role model. For the female adults of tomorrow who have grown up in these same households, there will have been an absence of influence during formative periods from appropriate, opposite, male sex role models.

For these same male and female adults of the coming decades there will have been little opportunity to experience the complex interplay and balancing of needs and interests between the two caring adults who bare the primary responsibility for rearing children (Coleman, 1987, pp 37-38). These and other factors are typical results of traditional family arrangements, but may be poorly represented or absent from households headed by a single parent. Additionally, given the high incidence of divorce among parents with dependent children in the United States (Education Week, 1986, p. 25), many of these children will have lived through the breakup of their parents' marriage and their personal family, in some cases more than once.

Disadvantaged youth, age 9 - 15, have basic needs that are no different from children of the same ages from advantaged circumstances. Both need appropriate parental supervision and support in their homes. However, disadvantaged children may have no hope for supplementary forms of support. The traditional family arrangement not only provided assistance or guidance to the children with their homework assignments, but also served as an important source of the child's development of critical thinking and problem solving, social development, and moral reasoning. Without the support available from the traditional family arrangement, children from disadvantaged circumstances, called latch key kids, are left to their own devices during before and after school hours and on weekends.

Teenage Pregnancy and Illegitimate Birth

Accompanying the changes in family arrangements are two other problems that influence in important ways the quality of life experienced by young children today: teen-age pregnancy and illegitimate birth. In recent decades there has been a significant increase in the occurrence of both outcomes. From another point of view, as the number of teen-age youth in our society has decreased in relation to the number of persons in other age classifications, the numbers of teen-age pregnancies and illegitimate births have increased significantly (Education Week, 1986, p. 22). The result has been a significant increase in our society of children who are born to children.

These findings provide a convincing argument for public policy that provides assistance to disadvantaged youth, particularly females, in the prevention of pregnancy and the care and feeding of their children. As these services are provided, there is need also of attention to the continuing educational needs of pregnant females and teenage parents, so that these youth achieve at least minimum levels of competency with academic and occupational skills for eventual employment. Also, there is need of inter-generational programs for the effective treatment of family histories of illiteracy.

Compounding the problem of teen-age pregnancy and illegitimate birth are the mother's condition of poverty, poor diet, and lack of knowledge about pre and post natal care of children. It is not uncommon for teen-age mothers to give birth to children prematurely. These babies tend to have weights that are lower than average and tend to have immune systems that are not fully developed in preparation for birth. As a consequence, both the mother (who is herself only an adolescent) and the child grow up in conditions of near extreme deprivation and dependency. Black teen-age girls continue to record disproportionately higher rates of birth than White girls, although the rate of births among White teen-age girls has been increasing in recent years (Education Week, 1986, p. 22).

The latter point helps to establish that these statistics concerning changing conditions of family life, teen-age pregnancy, and illegitimate birth are important not only in regard to the boys and girls who suddenly become fathers and mothers, but also in regard to the developmental problems (physical, psychological, and social) which their children will experience. It has been reported (Education Week, 1986, p. 22) that 14 percent (500,000) of all children born in the year 1983 were to mothers who were under the age of 20. If this trend continues for long, our society will soon have a significant number of adult persons whose poor condition of health is attributable to irreversible, obstetric causes.

Poverty

There is sufficient historical evidence to conclude that the interests of this nation have been to provide all people with equal opportunities for pursuit of the good life. However, if our society claims to offer equality of opportunity to all people regardless of race, gender, and creed, but functions so as to reproduce poverty among particular groups of its people, there is a process (albeit unintentional) for insuring that only certain subgroups in this society will endure the ravages of poverty. This process is referred to as the institutionalization of poverty, and may be due to a systematic neglect of underlying issues and problems that are difficult to recognize or to address.

Despite important legislative efforts to insure equality of opportunity (e.g., Civil Rights Laws), certain subgroups of people in this country tend to experience family histories of poverty. Data reported by the United States Bureau of Census and the Institute for Research on Poverty tend to support the conclusion that a particular segment of American society is poor and will remain poor. Gender, race, and now age are the key variables for the interpretation of results (Education Week, 1986, p. 27). In more specific terms, children in single parent households, elderly people, and minority females who are heads of households make up the largest group of people living in poverty. The recent epidemic of teen-age pregnancies has added teen-age mothers to this group of people who are most likely to live in poverty.

In many instances, the life styles of people living in poverty include much more that is worthy of the policy maker's attention than the lack of a regular job for the breadwinner and sufficient money in the family for food, clothing, and shelter. Too often the children who grow up in poverty stricken households endure and suffer from serious cases of physical and sexual abuse, alcoholism and drug abuse among parents and friends of the family, tragedy, and extreme forms of depression and frustration (Clark, 1983). When these circumstances of life are coupled with a family history of illiteracy, delinquency, disregard for schooling, and imprisonment, the disadvantaged child's prospects are very poor for even minimal achievement in academic and occupational subjects in the public school (Clark, 1983).

Disadvantaged children, who are between the ages of 9 and 15, constitute a significant number of youth who make up the group of people living in poverty. Unless these children receive assistance that enables them to cope with and, in cases of emergency, actually to be removed from seriously dysfunctional or oppositional home environments, there is a high probability that the patterns of life which these children endure will become the blueprints for their own adult lives. This kind of social neglect results in a progressive development of family history characterized by unemployment, illiteracy, and dysfunctional living. In this sense, poverty is an important correlate to school failure and drop out. There is an urgent need for public policy to provide effective and continuing support for the disadvantaged children, aged 9 - 15, who live in poverty.

Pluralism, Education, and Employability

The adult population that will be available for the maintenance of American society in the next century will be very different from what it is today and from what it has been historically. The changes that have been documented in regard to the population of youth today, permit us to make reasonably accurate predictions about the characteristics of the American work force for the near future. The main point of the preceeding is this: unless appropriate corrective action is taken soon, disadvantaged youth, particularly those between the ages of 9 - 15, will be at great risk of becoming, unemployable people for most, if not all, of their adult lives.

This report on the demographic characteristics of disadvantaged youth also calls attention to the need for expression of concern about the psychological and social conditions of youth "at risk," especially those between the ages of 9 and 15. It is reasonable to conclude that the conditions of life reported here in regard to these disadvantaged youth will lead them to make poor decisions about personal and social welfare and that their actions will precipitate conditions of endangerment not only for themselves but also for the rest of society.

No society can afford for long to support a disproportionate number of poor, illiterate, and unemployable adults. The demand for productivity in work and economic activity will soon exceed the supply of capable individuals. It is urgent that policy makers design programs of assistance which are based upon the real life circumstances of youth and that deal effectively with the correlates and causes of unemployability among disadvantaged youth. Public policy must help youth "at risk" to value work and to pursue educational and economic opportunities that enable them to achieve high levels of competence in basic skills for a lifetime of participation in the work force of this nation. The target population of 9 - 15-year-olds presents a particularly good period during the formative years of childhood and young adolescence for effective treatment of this dual interest in the education of disadvantaged youth.

Developmental Characteristics of 9 - 15-year-old Children

Life for the human being is a complex process of growth from birth until death. Every child that is born is a tiny person with peculiar physical, psychological, and emotional conditions and potentialities. The varied experiences of life should transform the helpless and dependent infant into a caring and productive adult. To a considerable extent, a society assures itself of long-term health and security by providing a high quality of nurturance to its dependent children.

However, when children experience negligent or oppositional treatment, they tend to respond in kind. When children suffer from negligence, they become adults, whose lives are filled with frustration, disappointment, and cynicism. Abused children have a high potential for becoming pathological adults, who inflict harm on other individuals and on their society. Due to a variety of circumstances, not the least of which is the changing character of the American family, our society must provide assurance that all children, but especially the disadvantaged, receive proper care during the formative years.

The years between 9 and 15 are filled with a great amount of developmental turmoil. This is the period of human growth that sees the end of childhood, the duration of adolescence, and the beginning of young adulthood. Children go through a great number of physical, emotional and psychological changes during this period. Human development does not progress in a linear fashion, but rather in cycles. One year these children are happy and settled, and the next year they are moody and depressed.

Research of child and adolescent psychology provides descriptions and explanations of behavior typical of 9 through 15-year-old youth. The findings from psychological studies are particularly useful in this discussion of disadvantaged youth. The report to follow shows that the normal development of children during this developmental stage requires careful, nurturant behavior on the part of parents, guardians, and other adults, such as teachers, who have responsibility for the care and education of youth. Youth at this stage of development are no longer children and are not quite adults. Their lives swing from periods of relative stability to relative instability and, without proper guidance, these great swings can cause them serious difficulty in later stages of development.

In some instances disadvantaged youth come from homes that lack appropriate role models and have little or no supervision from adults. Neighborhoods, housing projects, and apartment complexes that are occupied by disadvantaged families may provide adequate housing, but offer too little assistance with the ordinary demands of raising children. When support for the children comes from a single parent, the requirements for work to earn wages at full-time and overtime interfere with the demands for provision of appropriate child care. Many of these disadvantaged children are left at home alone for entire days without adult supervision. Because some of the disadvantaged youth come from dysfunctional homes, there is need of direct and continuous assistance that helps to prevent these children from becoming adults who behave in dysfunctional or oppositional ways.

The years from 9 - 11 include great developmental changes for children. The 9-year-old children are demanding characters and enjoy physical play, neighborhood friends, and their family. As they pass through year 10, they begin to make the transition from childhood to pre-adolescence. Although still childlike, they are becoming more aware of themselves and of others. As year 11 approaches, developmental changes become more evident in the child. Eleven-year-old children are in a state of physical, emotional and psychological conflict. Their bodies, especially girls, are beginning to mature in physical ways, a change which can lead to feelings of awkwardness, fear, and embarrassment (Gesell, 1956, p. 76).

These children are becoming more aware of the social world and they begin comparing themselves with others. These comparisons serve as the basis of the 11-year-old child's search for self. In many instances, 11-year-old children find conflicts between what they see themselves as and what others seem to perceive them to be. This leads to a state of turmoil, that results in moodiness and unhappiness (Erickson, 1963, p. 260). These changes have profound effects on the child, family relationships, and school life. According to Gesell (1956, p. 456), age 11 seems to be the worst age of this particular period.

The turmoil of age 11 ends during year 12. When children become 12 years old, although they still experience developmental changes, they are becoming more stable. Even though they are quickly becoming adolescents, 12-year-olds seem to be holding on to and enjoying the end of their pure childhood years. This is indicated by their tendency to alternate back and forth between childish and mature behavior (Gesell, 1956, p. 365). Regardless of the changes occurring at this stage, most 12-year-old children are happy.

The stability and contentment of age 12 quickly ends as 13 approaches. Socially, this period of time is a turning point for many children. They are now considered "teenagers," a period of time characterized by intense physical, emotional, and psychological unrest. At this stage children are thrust into a new social environment that makes advanced and inconsistent demands of them (Elkind, 1984, p. 143).

Thirteen-year-old children are in a stage of sadness and moodiness. They are easily hurt, annoyed, and irritated, and they cry and sulk more often (Gesell, 1956, p. 347). This is an extremely hard period for families because the 13-year-old has a great tendency to withdraw. Children at age 13 do not like to be bothered and would rather spend their time alone. This is the first real step in the long process of separation that children must go through in order to become adults (Gesell, 1956, p. 406). Children in this stage spend a great amount of time thinking about themselves, their present lives, and their futures. During this time they try to impress others with their high level of knowledge and sophistication, while in reality they do not feel confident or ready for this role (Elkind, 1981, p. 108).

The perceptions that 13-year-old children have of themselves are greatly influenced by the opinions of their peer group. They spend a great deal of time worrying about their appearance and their behavior in the presence of others. It is an age of great involvement with comparison and competition. Although they try to hide their feelings, 13-year-old children are very sad and unsure of themselves. Their comparisons with others usually justify their feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction. These feelings serve to intensify the 13-year-old's sadness.

The turmoil of this age decreases with the onset of the fourteenth year. Although children who are 14 do experience conflicts during this stage, it is usually a happy year for most of them. When they turn 14, the children are still preoccupied with their own activities, as they were at 13. The difference now is that they are beginning to establish close relationships with same sex peers and adults outside of their home. The 14-year-old shares activities and thoughts with these people. Thus, 14 seems to be the end of a transition period for children. By this stage children have moved their focus from the home to the social arena (Gesell, 1956, p. 406).

This transition period causes more arguments between parents and children, than during previous years. At this age children are becoming more detached from their families and more preoccupied with themselves and their relationships with peers. Although comparisons and jealousies continue during this stage, children cope with these aspects of life differently than in the earlier period. This middle stage of teenage life is characterized by a fascination with conformist behavior. During this stage, children have a need to be perceived by adults as independent, but in reality they have a loss of identity and tend to want to become like everybody else. The conformist behavior forces most children to focus their attention on formation of strong same sex relationships for the purpose of security (Erickson, 1963, p. 262).

The smoothness and ease of 14 is somewhat shattered by age 15. This period is generally the end of early adolescence and the beginning of young adulthood. It is a period of great social development in which most children become very interested in the opposite sex. Dating becomes more common and the same sex relationships of fourteen seem to become less dominant. Children at this stage show more signs of adulthood than ever before, although these actions may be pseudo indicators of actual maturity (Elkind, 1984, p. 101). The 15-year-olds try to appear more self-confident and self-controlled, although they are usually feeling muddled and confused.

Many children at age 15 display aggressive pride in their own ideas and opinions, even though they are still very anxious about their peer relations and level of popularity. The 15-year-old children are still comparing themselves with others and experiencing feelings of jealousy, but they try to hide these feelings from others. Children who are 15 years old are beginning to relate to peers and adults in a more mature manner, but they can still be brought to tears by frustration, failure, and criticism (Gesell, 1956, p. 348). Even though 15-year-old children are very close to becoming young adults, they are still moody and somewhat insecure adolescents during this stage.

As children continue through the teen years, they become more mature and independent. This further development would not be possible without the unstable and often unpleasant years between 9 and 15 years. During these seven years children move from childhood to young adulthood. A child must pass through these stages of conflict in order to become a healthy, stable adult. Children who are not allowed to develop at the normal rate through these stages may suffer social and psychological problems later on. Although these years are hard on all persons involved, all children, but especially the disadvantaged, need a great deal of encouragement, support, and love in order to reach their full potential as adults.

In the sections to follow there is first a discussion of the patterns of behavior leading to academic success or failure and then an examination of the achievement records of youth in basic academic skills. The records of disadvantaged youth indicate that some progress is being made, but that much more progress is needed in development of competence with basic skills. The prospects for eventual employment of disadvantaged youth become distressingly grim when a low level of proficiency in basic academic and occupational skills accompanies serious deficiencies and abuse in the home.

Patterns of Behavior Leading to Academic Success or Failure

Of considerable importance for this study of "at risk" youth is the notion that some people fail in school (and, in turn, in life) because they do not have a satisfactory repertoire of routine ways of perceiving and of acting that enable individuals, whether acting alone or cooperatively, to realize success. Failure is the logical and historical result for people whose lives are not enriched by these supportive, psychological structures. An important question becomes this: Do we train youth in effective modes of conduct or do we let them discover the effective patterns of behavior on their own?

People who are successful in their work do things in particular ways that enable them to complete their projects in at least a satisfactory manner. Success does not happen by accident or through magic. Another uncomfortable truism is that there are many instances when success with some human endeavor waits a long time for the discovery of a solution.

One's behavior, whether successful or unsuccessful in relation to an expressed aim or interest, is in part a process of acting in routine ways. These patterns of behavior are sometimes invented and worked out little by little over time by the individual person. More often these behavioral and perceptual structures are passed on to the person who needs them by significant others who found the routines useful for accomplishing their purposes (Mead, 1934 and Thomas, 1909). The whole process is known as cultural development. It defines the nature of being human and is the essential purpose of formal education.

When a person can attribute their successful resolution of a problem to their private endeavors, we say they have created and made use of a personal insight. They have made a discovery. True discoveries are rare occurrences. The illusiveness and rarity of creative thought for resolution of problems raises an important issue in this concern for 9 - 15-year-old disadvantaged youth. Expecting groups of people to rely upon their creative powers to solve deep and longstanding social and economic problems may be an implicit and insidious form of discrimination. If solutions exist, why are they unknown or unavailable to certain groups of people?

The study of routine ways of acting that lead to success or failure, results in a more fruitful inquiry. In other words, How do people act in situations? and Why? should be the leading questions whenever there is an interest in relying upon human nature to improve human conduct. The description and explanation of effective conduct will prove instrumental in the effort to prepare youth for successful experiences in school and work.

In what follows there is a summary of findings from an investigation of the patterns of behavior accounting for the success or failure in school of economically and educationally disadvantaged Black children. The focus on psychological and behavioral patterns among different families provides insights about educational programming that are important for this report of 9-15-year-old "at risk" youth.

The study conducted by Reginald Clark (1983) focused on the characteristics of family life for sixteen twelfth graders coming from ten different low income families living in three different communities. The study involved direct contact with the participants. The researcher relied upon interview and observation techniques for gathering data.

Clark concludes that it is not the "composition, or status, or some subset of family process dynamics" (p. 1) that enables some children from low income Black families to succeed in school. What best explains why some children succeed in school, despite their position of economic or educational disadvantage at the start, is "the overall quality of the family's life-style." If Clark is correct, and this author believes that he is, the role of family life in the social and academic life of the child in school is a critical factor, particularly when the child comes from an impoverished home.

Given that family life in contemporary America is undergoing important change for people in all ethnic groups and throughout the various categories of social and economic status, Clark's findings provide a valuable interpretation of the problems encountered by 9 - 15-year-old youth "at risk" and suggest reasonable methods of dealing effectively with the potential dropout problem (See also Coleman, 1987). Briefly, there is a need for more flexible and comprehensive, nonconsolidated, local public schools. There is also need for cooperative efforts between officials of the local public schools and representatives from other agencies and institutions, to deal in more effective ways with the social and cultural prerequisites for success among disadvantaged youth in school and in the adult world.

In the report to follow, the data deal generally with high school aged youth rather than the target population for this report--the 9 - 15-year-old disadvantaged youth. However, we may take the findings reported in the literature to be representative of disadvantaged youth, generally, and, also, indicative of circumstances typical for the 9 - 15-year-old target population of this report.

Life at Home Leading to Success in School

What happens in homes where children find success in school, despite economic and educational disadvantage? Two important distinctions must be made at the outset. One is that in families where children realize success in school there is an absence of traumatic or life-threatening circumstances. The other distinction is that parents of children who become high achievers in school have taken part themselves in a family tradition that, among other things, subscribed to the belief that a person could improve his or her circumstances through education.

These psychological and historical features help to distinguish between disadvantaged families whose children would succeed in school and those who would fail. It is not difficult to imagine that a child would not succeed in school who comes from a family where parents abuse one another and their children physically, psychologically, and in other ways, or whose family suffers some traumatic calamity and realizes little or no recovery.

Clark draws upon the work of sociologist Bernard Farber (1971) in classifying the perceptions and behavior as "sponsored independence" among families whose children become high achievers. Characteristic routines of these family members are: "frequent parent-child dialogue, strong parental encouragement in academic pursuits, clear and consistent limits set for the young, warm and nurturing interactions, and consistent monitoring of how they used their time" (Clark, 1983, p. 111). The parents responsible for sustaining these patterns of behavior in the name of family life for their children had experienced and endorsed a similar style of family life in their own past.

According to Clark (1983, p. 200) the routine ways of perceiving and acting among high achieving students are these:

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1. Frequent school contact initiated by parent
2. Child has had some stimulating, supportive school teachers
3. Parents psychologically and emotionally calm with child
4. Students psychologically and emotionally calm with parents
5. Parents expect to play major role in child's schooling
6. Parents expect child to play major role in child's schooling
7. Parents expect child to get post-secondary training
8. Parents have explicit achievement-centered rules and norms
9. Students show long-term acceptance of norms as legitimate
10. Parents establish clear, specific role boundaries and status structures with parents as dominant authority
11. Siblings interact as organized subgroup
12. Conflict between family members is infrequent
13. Parents frequently engage in deliberate achievement-training activities
14. Parents frequently engage in implicit achievement-training activities
15. Parents exercise firm, consistent monitoring and rules enforcement
16. Parents provide liberal nuturance and support
17. Parents defer to child's knowledge in intellectual matters

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Whether the students come from one-parent homes or two-parent homes, the result of these patterns of behavior for the children is high achievement in the school. In addition, the children recall having personal and educationally valuable relationships with their teachers. The high quality of classroom relationship includes ample opportunity for individual attention from the teacher and for taking responsibility for leadership in classroom activities.

Life at Home Leading to Failure in School

The routine ways of perceiving and acting so characteristic of the family life for high achieving disadvantaged children are almost totally absent from the family life experiences of low achieving disadvantaged children, whether in one or two-parent homes. What characterizes the family life best for the low achieving children are instead: "fewer social and material options and greater despair, pathos, lethargy, and psychological confusion" (Clark, 1983, p. 143). In these family situations, the expressions that parents give about the way they perceive matters betrays feelings of hurt, embarrassment, and shame about the situation they call home for their children.

Using the high achieving students' family style as a reference point, Clark (1983, p. 200) finds the following patterns of thinking and acting to be common among families of low achieving children:

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1. Infrequent school contact initiated by parent
2. Child has had no stimulating, supportive school teachers
3. Parents in psychological and emotional upheaval with child
4. Students less psychologically and emotionally calm with parents
5. Parents have lower expectations of playing role in child's schooling
6. Parents have lower expectation of child's role in child's schooling
7. Parents have lower expectation that child will get post-secondary training
8. Parents have less explicit achievement-centered rules and norms
9. Students have less long-term acceptance of norms
10. Parents establish more blurred role boundaries and status structures
11. Siblings are a less structured, interactive subgroup
12. Conflict between some family members is frequent
13. Parents seldom engage in deliberate achievement-training activities
14. Parents engage less frequently in implicit achievement-training
15. Parents have inconsistent standards and exercise less monitoring of child's time and space
16. Parents are less liberal with nurturance and support
17. Parents do not defer to child in intellectual matters

The patterns of behavior in the above list indicate the nature of the shift in family style between high and low achieving children who come from circumstances of economic and educational disadvantage.

Through the adept use of concrete description, Clark makes clearer the nature and origin of these two types of families. Clark describes the circumstances for many families of low achieving children as "depressing." The parents have struggled unsuccessfully for decades to achieve some progress in social and occupational interests. Their failure to achieve success contributes to high levels of frustration and depression.

Fathers, if they are present at all in the homes of low achieving disadvantaged children, show a tendency not to assume responsibility for child-rearing. The mothers assume most, if not all, of the responsibility for managing the affairs of the family. This effort at parental obligations expresses itself in the face of improbable chances for physical, much less economic, survival. What makes matters all the more distressing is a tendency on the part of the mothers in these families to harbor an "almost total sense of helplessness, aimlessness, and resignation to their economic and social lot" (Clark, 1983, p. 144).

In the homes of low achieving children one finds psychological and emotional turmoil, argument and sarcasm, apathy, inarticulate speech, yelling, crying, interruptions at the door, incessant ringing of the telephone, cycles of unemployment-reemployment-unemployment, irritability, cynicism, continual scolding, marital strife and abuse, threats of and actual physical assault, criticism, inordinate amounts of time spent sleeping, sense of incompetence and helplessness, inadequate food and poor diet, long family histories of dependency on alcohol and drugs, lack of control, lack of trust, theft of personal property by "friends," no indication of order or routine, no curfew, involvement with gangs, participation in neighborhood terrorism and vandalism, little or no knowledge of or involvement with children's schooling, children lack respect for their parents, an so on.

The above list is not exhaustive, but indicates clearly the dysfunctional character of the family circumstances common to some low achieving children who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. A combination of these events makes up the family life experiences of many youth "at risk." However, Clark (1983, p. 61) astutely observes that it has been common for sociologists to assume that these characteristics are representative of single-parent families, particularly those headed by minority women.

Circumstances of economic and educational disadvantage, while certainly influencing in important ways the student's performance in school, have less explanatory power than the routines of activity engaged in by family members and the belief system endorsed by the parents. One family will continue a downward spiral of social and occupational failure; another family will bring up children who aspire to and achieve success through the agency of the school. It is unreasonable to expect that those people whose family life is dysfunctional will be able to invent and make habitual the varied and complex structures so valuable for realizing a good life.

To sum up, earlier a distinction was made between placing value on the search for creativity and describing and explaining the products people invent and use to solve their problems. The research just reviewed argues persuasively that there is value in knowing what people do that makes it possible for them to succeed in life and, in particular, in rearing children. The terms of success are high achievement in school and securing productive and meaningful employment as an adult. Most people would agree that these are basic elements of a good life.

It is unreasonable to conclude that every person will be able singlehandedly to invent and perfect methods of rearing children that assure their children of living a success filled and meaningful life in the modern technological society. Millennia could pass before "the wheel" is reinvented. If there are ways that work, why not study them and put them to use properly? Why wait for people to rediscover them? These points are all the more disconcerting when acknowledging that in the recent past huge sums of money, numerous policy statements, and a barrage of techniques have been devoted to "remediating" impoverished families with culturally inappropriate and conceptually barren schemes. A more fruitful approach to the problem of "at risk" youth entails a search for and use of actual social and cultural mechanisms that produce successful, happy, and well adjusted children. An important caution concerns the need to build upon and show respect for the cultural heritage of the particular ethnic group to which the children belong.

Every child will know something upon arrival at school. What this study shows is that the cultural knowledge that certain children possess may be suited to survival in the street, but it is ineffective for academic study or occupational interests. The result for the children is loss or destruction of self-concept that is positive and relevant to life in school and society. When the lack of relevant cultural knowledge is coupled with a family history of failure, dysfunctional or oppositional behavior, and tragedy, the situation faced by the disadvantaged children is hopeless.

Academic Achievement

The descriptive data presented in the previous sections indicates that a significant number of disadvantaged youth in this nation experience social and economic problems that contribute to the incidence of early school leaving. The discussion to follow provides findings that are useful in regard to another important school-related variable--academic achievement. In this section there is an examination of the following questions: What achievement results are obtained by 9 - 15 year old disadvantaged youth in basic skills? What are the characteristic behaviors of students who succeed with learning basic skills? What school programs offer the best chance of success with basic skills for educationally and economically disadvantaged youth? Before answering these questions, some general comments are in order.

Disadvantaged students have shown consistently low performance levels in basic skills. Unless educators, authorities for the schools, and the general public are willing to place the blame for unsatisfactory achievement on these students, it is only reasonable to look with a critical eye on the schools themselves--their rigid organizational structures, limited and restrictive curriculum (tracking), standardized methods and materials for teaching, and narrow conceptions of learning (cf., Wehlage and Rutter, 1986). These notes of criticism indicate that educators, authorities for the schools, and policy makers need to determine what the purpose of schooling is, rather than continue waving the banner that reads: "meet the needs of all of the students." Without a clear notion about what should be studied by all students and why, efforts to change the curriculum and the school will become exercises of trial and error. For students as well as schools, the result will be to hit and miss the problems aimed at.

An assumption behind the above argument for reorganization of schools is that the way in which schools are organized presently is not working. The results of extensive investigations of achievement argue strongly that it will not suffice simply to make the schools work better in the way they are organized today. Characteristic of such efforts has been the practice of schools lately to increase standards, increase homework, and reenforce truancy laws. Good intentions notwithstanding, these policy changes merely insure that the same results accrue to the same students. The need, instead, is for the educators and policy makers to redefine the public school in terms of democratic principles and to recreate the role of education in contemporary society.

A responsible agenda for reform of the schools must provide assurance that there will be a meaningful education for all youth, but especially those who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. This principle supports the argument that educators reexamine the purpose of the school as they attempt to design new and better schools. If the form and the content of the "reorganized" school subscribes to traditional conceptions of teaching and learning, one can expect that students will respond as they have responded historically. In that case we have not achieved change, but rather the reestablishment of the status quo.

It is a common understanding that the primary function of the school is to impart the cultural heritage to all youth. However, students who consistently receive low and failing grades for academic work do not realize the intended benefits of attending school. Generally speaking, school dropouts do not show acceptable levels of achievement in academic course work and are "pushed out" of school because of the assumption that they are not capable of achieving at these levels. From this point of view, the school can be seen as an institution that is fulfilling an educational and social obligation to separate academic minded individuals from those who are not capable of doing academic work. The school "pushout", then, is an individual whose personal history of failure in school justifies selecting oneself out of formal schooling.

The maintenance of school policy and practice that pushes disadvantaged students out of school (unintentionally), is untenable. The interaction occurring between a student's personal and family history and the formal organization of the school contributes to the disadvantaged student's decision to leave school early. The variables characteristic of and attributable to the student and the school serve as correlates and causes of early school leaving. When a disadvantaged youth fails in school, this result may occur as a result of both the way schools operate and by the way students function in schools.

The decision of a student to leave school before receiving a diploma is complicated by different internal and external school and non-school variables. Researchers in education typically classify internal school variables as features of the "hidden" curriculum. Examples of the hidden curriculum include the effects of tracking (Goodlad, 1983, p. 159 and Oakes, 1985) and the formation of cliques and gangs among students (Wehlage, Stone, and Kliebard, 1980, and Willis, 1977). In other instances external variables influence a disadvantaged student's decision to leave school early. An example of the latter is growing up in a family that provides significant amounts of encouragement to the student (Baumrind, 1971 and Clark, 1983). Sometimes the external variable has little or no evident relationship with schooling. Examples of external, non-school variables include a student's decision to assume family roles and adult work roles (cf., Morgan, 1984). Although it has become fashionable in recent decades to dismiss the external school and non-school variables as outside the purview of the school's and the local community's responsibility (Clark, 1983, p. 209), an adequate and effective treatment of the dropout problem among disadvantaged youth between the ages of 9 and 15, calls for a serious commitment from all available resources in the community, including the schools.

Thus far, efforts by the public schools to deal with youth "at risk" of dropping out of school fall into two broad categories. One approach to solving the problem is to design and operate an alternative school for returnees and seriously "at risk" students. The alternative school is housed either in a building separate from or within the traditional school. A second approach, frequently antecedent to or accompanying the latter, is to increase the academic standards of the school curriculum. Neither of these approaches has proved to be an effective treatment of the problem and, indeed, may exacerbate the tendency for students to drop out of school at earlier levels (Hahn, Danzberger, and Lefkowitz, 1987; Wehlage and Rutter, 1986; and Wheelock, 1987)

These preliminary remarks in reference to academic achievement and school dropout help to establish the parameters of this discussion. In what follows there is first a report of research on school achievement. Next there is a report on what makes it possible for some students to succeed with basic skills, despite educational and economic disadvantage. In the concluding section, there is an examination of the characteristics of programs designed to prevent students from dropping out of school.

Academic Study and the Basics

It is reasonable to view the school as a place where a child receives something that is of value in enabling that individual to participate meaningfully and productively in the ordinary pursuits of life, from childhood through adulthood. More specifically, the efforts by teachers, principals, and other school officials are intended to impart the cultural heritage to youth. This organized body of knowledge, called the school curriculum, is usually subdivided into the following two areas: general studies in such areas as history, language, and science and specific skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics, that are intended for support of further study. On the face of it, the formal process of education unfolding in the school serves an educative function for the individual and, ultimately, for the society. However, it is naive to think that the school accomplishes this task alone and unaided or unencumbered by other social agencies and cultural effects.

There are numerous other aspects of life which influence in important ways the quality of education a student receives in school and the manner and extent to which a student may use this education. Each of the agencies outside of the school has its own "curriculum" for the youth of the nation. In addition, the character and pace of cultural change in the society exacerbate the problem of how to formally educate youth, particularly those who come from disadvantaged circumstances.

As Lawrence Cremin (1976, p. 52) has observed, the school is but one agency serving to educate the individual and society. Commenting on the reports released from international studies about lifelong education, Cremin writes:

> ...education proceeds in many situations and through many institutions other than the school, that individuals are involved in education throughout their life span, that any realistic national or international planning for education must take account of these fundamental facts, and that for free societies the goals of such planning must be, first, to establish structures and methods that will assist individuals throughout their lives in maintaining the continuity of their apprenticeship and training and, second to equip each individual "to become in the highest and truest degree both the object and the instrument of his own development through the many forms of self-education."

From this viewpoint, the school is seen as one place among many where a person receives important educational experiences. Also, in developed countries, such as our own, a particular type of education will take place in school--formal education, but both the formal education in the school and the informal education (wherever it occurs) continue beyond the age limits associated with traditional conceptions of schooling.

The concern in this report is for the education of disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15, and its implications throughout their lives. There is also a concern, shared by various authorities in education, for the substantive reorganization of schools and the processes of schooling (Cremin, 1976 and Goodlad, 1983, and Kliebard, 1987). From this perspective, the curriculum of the school would challenge all youth in the academic subjects and skills. At the same time, students would receive training in occupational skills and would become immersed in programs that emphasize the relationships between academic study, careers, and vocational or technical interests.

These notes about the role of formal schooling in the education of youth are not meant to distract attention from the legitimate and actual function of the school. The point is rather to characterize in a straightforward manner the central function of the school and to clarify briefly the possibilities and the limits of the school.

If the central function of the school is to educate all youth, this nation should expect that the disadvantaged youth who attend public schools will show a reasonable level of achievement in subjects that make up the explicit curriculum of the school. Receipt of a diploma upon graduation from required attendance in formal schooling should certify that a young person, regardless of disadvantaged circumstances, has successfully completed the common secondary school curriculum (Goodlad, 1984).

However, many disadvantaged youths do not complete their formal, public schooling. Furthermore, the results of research focused on the students who do complete their schooling are discouraging. For instance, John Goodlad (1984, p. 163) argues that among all of those who do receive a high school diploma, only one third complete a "balanced, relatively common curriculum" (See also Kliebard, 1987, p. 95). A number of studies show that among the dropouts and completers, particularly among disadvantaged youth, there is a low level of achievement in basic skills. It is instructive to combine this concern for dropouts with an interest in the low level of achievement in basic skills among the student population, generally. A responsible conclusion is that among dropouts and completers alike, there are large numbers of youth who have grave deficiencies in basic academic and occupational skills. In other words, many adults of American society in the next century will function at or below a minimum level of literacy and employability (Calan, 1987).

Many experts would express agreement that the chances are severely limited for a disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15, to participate meaningfully and productively in the typical social and economic pursuits of adulthood. The dropout's achievement record in school, particularly in regard to basic academic and occupational skills, influences not only the likelihood of graduation from high school, but also success with post secondary education and employment in the work force. To some extent, the school program itself is responsible for the deficiencies among disadvantaged students. Public policy should encourage or require that public schools make fundamental, structural and organizational changes, as well as programmatic changes.

High School Diploma or Equivalent

If the high school diploma has a valuable role to play in the employability of all youth, the dropout rates indicate that the employment prospects are not good for disadvantaged youth "at risk." An examination of trends over a ten year period from 1974 - 1985 led the Center for Education Statistics to conclude that, on a national basis, approximately 24 percent of the public school ninth graders do not stay in school to complete requirements for a diploma (See "School Dropouts," 1986, p. 5). However, at the local school level, significant variations occur. In urban centers like Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and New York, for instance, drop out rates nearly equal or exceed 50 percent of the original freshman class (See Hahn, Danzberger, and Lefkowitz, 1987). In suburban areas, like Beechwood, Ohio or Oak Brook, Illinois, the dropout rate, if indeed there is one, is a negligible fact.

A variety of consequences befall disadvantaged youth who do not complete their public schooling. Among the more notable results are:

- non-completers have a lower likelihood of participating in the labor force than high school graduates.
- a student who drops out of high school earns less money than youth who receive a high school diploma.
- school dropouts have less general knowledge than school completers.

In addition, a variety of other consequences influence the dropout's life. Included are increased chances of living in poor health, participating minimally if at all in political affairs, and realizing little social mobility.

An awareness of these results and the validity of these and other claims about what it takes to live a good life has led some dropouts to either return to the school to complete their public school education or to seek an alternative certification, such as General Educational Development (GED) testing.

A study recently completed in California estimates that as many as 40 percent of the students who drop out of school either secure a diploma equivalent or enter a trade school or community college (California Legislature Assembly Office of Research, 1985). After adjusting for effects attributable to liberal enrollment policies specific to California between high school and community colleges, Kolstead and Owings (1986) estimate that 30 percent of the dropouts nationally obtain either a high school diploma or its equivalent. The 30 percent figure struck the Center for Education Statistics as a reasonably good estimate of a national trend among returnees.

However encouraging these results seem to be, additional data reported by Kolstad and Owings (1986) regarding returnees show the following disappointing results:

- early dropouts from school are less likely to return to complete requirements for a high school degree than students who drop out later in their school years.
- there are fewer returnees among Black and Hispanic dropouts than among Whites.
- completion of high school is less likely to occur among dropouts from low socioeconomic backgrounds than those from backgrounds of economic advantage.
- dropouts who have low test scores are less likely to return later to complete requirements for a high school diploma.
- there is a lower rate of return among dropouts living in rural and urban communities than in suburban communities.

There is more discouraging news in the report from the researchers at the University of Wisconsin. Summarizing the work at Wisconsin, Tugend (1986) reports that adults who hold a GED and later enroll in college, tend to be much less likely to graduate from college than the regular high school graduate.

The main point in regard to the proof of proficiency with high school subject matter is that an equivalent form, such as the GED, may serve a useful role, but then there is no real substitute for a diploma. Generally speaking, it is good for schools to encourage students to remain in high school to complete requirements for the diploma. However, the fact that large numbers of disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15, are "at risk" of dropping out of high school, suggests that the standard public school--in terms of structure, policy, and practice--may not be appropriate for a significant number of students. We may take the choice of these students to drop out of public school as a rejection of the institution that has been designed for their benefit (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986).

Retention and Achievement

From the standpoint of the school, a student's low performance in the basic academic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics is a primary factor in the school's decision to retain students. Of the three basic skills, a low level of performance in reading achievement is considered to be the most important factor in a student's potential for success with school subjects. The relationship between retention policies and a student's achievement in basic skills influences the disadvantaged youth's decision to drop out of school.

Retaining students in the primary grades for unsatisfactory achievement in basic skills is a leading school related variable influencing a student's decision to leave school early (Wheelock, 1986 and Hahn, Danzberger, and Lefkowitz, 1987). According to Jerold Bachman (1984), the retention of a student in one of the primary grades increases the risk of dropping out later by 40 - 50 percent. Students who are held back two grades have a 90 percent chance of dropping out of school. While the report to follow focuses on student achievement in general, it is a reasonable assumption that disadvantaged youth fare much worse than advantaged students.

Reading achievement that is significantly below grade level is a factor of considerable importance in a teacher's decision to recommend holding a student back in school. The assumption behind the school's policy regarding retention of a student for low reading scores is that another year of work in reading will lead to reading achievement scores for the student that are at or above grade level. Although research reports dispute the claim regarding improvement (Featherstone, 1986 and Hess and Greer, 1986), school policy in effect at many local districts continues to allow for retention of students for unsatisfactory reading achievement.

In a recent report Schulz, Toles, and Rice (1986, p. 5) argue that there is a "linear relationship between reading achievement and dropout rates." These researchers also argue that the age at which a student enters high school is a significant factor determining the incidence of dropout. Generally speaking, below grade level reading achievement and higher than average age upon entering high school increase significantly a disadvantaged student's chances of leaving school before graduation.

Given the concern for "at risk" youth in the 9 - 15 year old age group, these two variables express an interesting relationship in the process of schooling. Retention occurs most frequently during the primary grade school years. It is during this period of time that the student's achievement, especially, in reading and mathematics is monitored carefully and, if significantly below grade level, such scores are used to justify retention (Featherstone, 1986 and Schulz, Toles, and Rice, 1987). Retention for low achievement during the primary school experience increases the age at which the same student will enter high school. As a child proceeds through the grades, retention places an individual in the company of younger and younger classmates, contributing to development of a lower self-concept and increasing the individual pupil's sense of frustration and disillusionment about school. For some youth, dropping out of school becomes the only way out of a schooling experience that is based upon embarrassment, failure, and alienation.

Reading Achievement and the "At Risk" Student

Achievement levels in reading seem to be increasing for American students. A recent report on the results of a study of reading achievement during a thirteen year period of time among 9, 13, and 17 year old students, indicates that performance is up among all groups (The Reading Report Card, 1986). The students who took the tests in 1984 showed sizeable improvements in reading achievement over comparable students who took the tests in the 1971, 1975, 1981, and 1984 school years.

Results obtained from students classified either as Black, Hispanic, or disadvantaged showed measurable improvement. The researchers conclude their statement of accomplishments with the following: "Virtually all 13- and 17-year-old students can read **basic** material, and 84 percent of the 17-year-olds still in school have acquired the **intermediate** reading skills and strategies necessary to understand specific and general information in relatively lengthy reading passages" (The Reading Report Card, p. 6). The message clearly has a positive tone. However, the authors' use of bold type for the terms "basic" and "intermediate" indicates that much work remains to be done. Reports from a variety of other sources indicate that there is reason to exercise caution when interpreting the results of this study.

For instance, researchers who have been studying the behavior that is characteristic of "at risk" students (See Hahn, Danzberger, and Lefkowitz, 1987 and Wehlage and Rutter, 1986) speculate that these individuals are likely not to show up in school on days when formal or informal examinations are scheduled. This action on the part of the student is "evasive" in the sense that it protects the students from further erosion of their self-concept. Skipping class during test days is "subversive" (implicitly, if not actually) in the sense that it leads to test results for school authorities which, while not invalid, nonetheless do not accurately reflect the total range of achievement.

Of particular importance for the interpretation of test scores is the frequency of scores showing reading achievement that is significantly above and below average. If these researchers are correct in their characterization of "at risk" student behavior (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986), then students with below average achievement levels are under represented in reports of achievement testing.

An earlier report titled, Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985), provided an explanation of the reading process and the problems of teaching reading to youth in contemporary society. In a way, Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985) seems to anticipate the results published in the Reading Report Card (1986) and to prepare the public for its arrival. The authors of Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985, p. 95) suggest that educators and policy makers exercise caution when making decisions about reading instruction based solely on reading test scores. Why is this note of caution relevant to the present discussion of reading achievement? In recent years local school policy has dictated that teachers be held accountable for demonstrating achievement gains among students. When test scores are used to determine the effectiveness of teaching, teachers tend to teach the tests to students. This practice is a feature of the hidden curriculum of the classroom. It protects teachers and students from suffering unreasonable demands of superordinates, but leads to results on tests that are misleadingly positive and contributes to effects in literacy development that are counterproductive.

There was no particular effort in the conduct of the reading assessment to investigate "at risk" students between the ages of 9 and 15. However, categories were established for members of minority groups and distinctions were made between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students. Results of the study suggest that the reservations and criticisms expressed above have validity and may have support in this study of reading achievement among 9-15-year-old disadvantaged youth. In the statement of suggestions for improvement, the authors of The Reading Report Card (1986) acknowledge that the average level of reading achievement for students classified as minorities and disadvantaged is "quite low and in need of further improvement" (pp. 6-7).

Of particular importance to an interest in early identification of "at risk" students is this note from the Reading Report Card (1986):

> Six percent of 9-year-olds in 1984 could not do **rudimentary** reading exercises and are in danger of future school failure. Forty percent of 13-year-olds and 16 percent of 17-year-olds attending high school have not acquired **intermediate** reading skills and strategies, raising the question of how well these students can read the range of academic material they are likely to encounter in school. Few students, only about 5 percent, even at age 17, have **advanced** reading skills and strategies. (p. 7)

Clearly, the gains in reading achievement between different cohorts of students in the thirteen year span of time (1971-1984) are not sufficient to characterize the typical American student as a good reader. Generally speaking, economically and educationally disadvantaged youth have very low achievement records in basic academic skills and, unless appropriate corrective action is taken immediately, a sizeable population of American youth will become illiterate and unemployable adults (Catteral, 1987 and Pallas, 1986).

The Reading Report Card shows that there has been a "sizeable improvement" in reading achievement as measured by standardized tests, but the gains still do not place the mean level of achievement (average of all scores) above the median (midpoint of all scores in a frequency distribution). Overall, this report suggests that the average reading performance of students nationally is still below a satisfactory level. Particularly noteworthy is the low incidence (5 percent) of students demonstrating reading achievement at the advanced level. Not only are the low scores low, the high scores are not represented very well in these examinations of reading achievement (Digest of Education Statistics, 1987, p. 88).

Although there is evidence of improvement in general among youth, these results indicate that the actual performance of disadvantaged students is low (Digest of Education Statistics, 1987, p. 88). If "at risk" students are perceived simply as "underachievers," then a simple redistribution of time, methods, and materials for instruction would be all that is needed to boost the achievement results to an appropriate and acceptable level. However, the characteristics of the early school leaver indicate clearly that more of the same in reading, writing, and mathematics instruction will most likely generate more of the same unsatisfactory results in achievement.

For public policy to deal appropriately with the education of disadvantaged youth, between the ages of 9 and 15, educators, policy makers, and the general public must change their perception of what is basic in an educational program to include both occupational skills and academic skills. There is also a serious need for innovative organizational structures for schooling, so that the work of educating youth can go on where it is needed. Lastly, the particular educational needs of disadvantaged youth, like those of the advantaged youth, can be met best where there are creative, flexible, and responsible designs for curriculum.

Writing Achievement and the "At Risk" Student

The results of a ten year study recently reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that the writing achievement levels of American students were no better in 1984 than they were in 1974. The overall assessment of the students' writing performance was judged by supervisors of the project to be poor (*Writing: Trends Across the Decade, 1974-84*) and that both educationally advantaged and disadvantaged students showed poor achievement levels in writing. Because the quality of one's writing is a reflection of the quality of one's thinking these results indicate that the processes of thinking associated with informative writing, persuasive writing, and imaginative writing may be at seriously deficient levels among students, generally. It is reasonable to assume that these thought processes and writing skills are at seriously low levels of development among the disadvantaged youth between 9 and 15-years-old.

An examination of possible differences in writing achievement across students classified as Black, Hispanic, and White ethnic groups showed that results were similar for all groups: poor. The study did not focus specifically on "at risk" students or dropouts. However, the findings provide additional support for existing claims about students who are educationally disadvantaged and "at risk" of leaving school early. As Hahn, Danzberger, and Lefkowitz (1987, p. 17) note, "study after study has documented the low reading, writing, math, science, speaking/listening, and reasoning abilities of potential and actual dropouts." The data offer convincing evidence that disadvantaged youth in the 9 - 15-year-old range have serious deficiencies in processes of thinking which are important for informative, persuasive, and expressive writing.

An important point in regard to writing achievement is that public schools have not been very successful with the development of competencies in basic academic skills among disadvantaged youth. The reports about basic skills achievement (Hahn, Danzberger, and Lefkowitz, 1987) and school organization (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986) strongly suggest that public policy encourage local districts to create programs that deal more comprehensively and more systematically with the development of writing achievement among disadvantaged youth. If the student's writing achievement is below grade level and is also below ability level, then the policies and practices of the school are promoting underachievement, false impressions of academic performance, and low self-concept.

These results suggest that public policy encourage or require the public schools to open appropriate facilities for educators to develop innovative curriculum plans and adaptable organizational structures for promoting learning among disadvantaged youth. Policy makers need to recognize in these data that some students do not graduate from high school because of the way schools are presently organized. The large, consolidated school is a suspicious operation in the effort to reform the public schools. The policies and practices needed to maintain order there have become self-sustaining mechanisms that have replaced the primary function of schools (Cusick, 1986). Subscription to academic studies, rigid schedules, herding policies for peer conscious children and adolescents, and discriminatory suspension policies create a proclivity for failure among children who may not understand or appreciate the role of public schooling in their present or future lives.

Math Achievement and the "At Risk" Student

The achievement of American students in mathematics was reassessed in 1982 through the Second International Mathematics Study (SIMS). The First International Mathematics Study (FIMS) was conduced in 1964. The intent of FIMS and SIMS was to investigate mathematics achievement among comparable 8th and 12th grade students on a cross-national basis (Garden, 1987). The planned replication of the study after 18 years provided educators and policy makers with continuous descriptive data on students' mathematics achievement. In this way curriculum changes could be planned, implemented, and assessed in a cooperative manner with data drawn from a longitudinal investigation (eight countries participated in both studies). The data from SIMS suggest that there is a need for innovative programs to raise the math achievement records of 9-15-year-old disadvantaged youth.

The results showed that American students fared less well than many of their counterparts in other developed countries. Commenting on the results of 8th graders, Joe Crosswhite (1987, p. 56), President of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics noted: "Although U.S. performance was not at the bottom of the distribution, it was not at a level with which we should be satisfied." The average mathematics score for students in the 8th grade in the 1981-82 school year was 42 percent. The average score in algebra and calculus for the top 5 percent of twelfth graders in the same school year was 52 percent (See Crosswhite, 1987, pp. 55-57). The measure of gain in achievement was found to be modest among American students in both 8th and 12th grades during the eighteen-year period of time.

The results of SIMS analyzed thus far suggest that American students are learning lower-level skills in mathematics, but that these same students do not show sufficient progress with higher-level skills. In other developed countries, namely Japan, "some of the most dramatic gains in high school mathematics are with the higher level skills" (Horvath, 1987, p. 367). A reasonable conclusion to be drawn from the data is that the mathematics achievement of students in the United States has not improved significantly in the past two decades (See Horvath, 1987, p. 367). It is plausible to conclude that the low math scores for the general population of United States students indicate that disadvantaged youth have very low levels of proficiency in basic as well as higher order computational skills.

The mathematics achievement of American students is lower than they are capable of demonstrating. These results suggest that there is need for rethinking prevailing views of what mathematics is and what constitutes appropriate methods and emphases of instruction in mathematics for elementary and secondary students (See Crosswhite, 1987, p. 54). The generally low mathematics scores for students in grades 8 and 12 indicate that there is a critical need for reform of the mathematics curriculum at earlier levels in the schooling experience of children. More specifically, low achievement in mathematics, like low achievement in reading and writing, are characteristic features of disadvantaged youth "at risk" of dropping out of school. An important point here is that these low achievement results of students are attributable, at least partially, to the school curriculum. An improvement in the mathematics achievement of disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15, depends upon development of an innovative mathematics curriculum.

To sum up, this segment of the discussion of "at risk" students has drawn attention to the achievement records of American youth in three basic skill areas: reading, writing, and mathematics. Numerous reports in the literature have alerted experts in education, policy makers, and the public about the generally low level of academic achievement among American youth.

The present study supports the findings reported elsewhere and provides discussion and additional data to confirm the opinions expressed by other researchers. In particular, the following questions seem pertinent: Why do nearly one quarter of American youth not graduate from high school? and What causes economically and educationally disadvantaged youth to be "at risk" of leaving school early when they are only 9 - 15 years old?

Explanations for significant differences in achievement results of American students may be attributed to factors directly related to the process of instruction in the schools of the United States. For instance, Crosswhite (1987) calls attention to important differences in the occupational characteristics of teachers in the United States and Japan. Briefly, teachers in the United States spend more time teaching different subjects or different topics within subjects. This fact means that the Japanese teacher has more time for preparation to teach and more time to devote to particular subjects or specific topics within subjects. The teacher in the United States, by contrast, must cover "more" territory in smaller blocks of time and with less time to prepare. As a consequence, the American curriculum tends to be a hypothetical middle ground of content that is targeted for a hyopothetical average type of student. A specialist, who has a limited awareness of the regular curriculum and the performance of other students, provides assistance through "pull out" programs to low achieving students.

In addition, the Japanese teacher's additional time for preparation allows for sustained periods of time devoted to collegial activity. This is an extremely limited feature of professional life among teachers in the United States and is best known as a "short coffee break" in the lounge or "four minutes for class change time." Ample time for preparation to teach also means that teachers have more time to meet on a one-to-one basis with particular students. The latter affords opportunity for individual teachers to provide the personal, sustained forms of encouragement and coaching so valuable in the life of a student, regardless of ability.

Apparently, there is an important difference in the perceived purpose for public secondary school education in the United States and in other countries. The students' perception of the implicit and explicit purposes of their school may account to some extent for the different results we obtain. To explain further, it is a common practice in the elementary and secondary schools in the United States to have three or four tracks offering differentiated instruction to students. Typical names for these tracks in the secondary schools are remedial, vocational/ technical, business, and college preparatory (See Oakes, 1985 and Rosenbaum, 1976). Entry into one of these tracks, inauspiciously labeled as gifted and talented education, occurs officially as early as the third grade in the elementary school experience. Hence, at a very young age, children develop an awareness that the schools have different expectations of achievement from students. Ostensibly, such differences are dependent upon a student's establishment of a proven record of high academic achievement. Crosswhite (1987, p. 58) reports that this practice is not common to other developed nations. According to Crosswhite: "In Japan, in fact, educators claimed to hold the same curricular expectations for all students through grade 10" (1987, p. 58).

The purpose of secondary schools in the United States, as illustrated in The Shopping Mall High School (1985), seems to be to offer students a miscellaneous collection of subjects accompanied by simplistic notions of equality of opportunity and freedom of choice. Partly as a consequence of this artifact of schooling, students develop the false and misleading impression that anyone can do anything. This perception on the part of students, deeply rooted in contemporary American culture (See Fromm, 1956, pp. 12-13), leads to permissiveness, aimlessness, and, for our purposes, minimum competency in academic subjects for the vast majority of American students.

As Herbert Kliebard notes (1986 and 1987) the high schools have not always had a "vague and high-sounding laundry list of aims and an immense variety of merchandise" (1987, p. 96). The trend toward this result, however, now has a history of nearly 100 years. The earlier architects of secondary education had high aspirations for youth. Educators like Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard from 1869-1909, intended to design high schools that would encourage high achievement in accordance with a student's ability. As a number of reports have made clear recently, the American high school of today offers, instead, differentiated instruction. The institution functions, at least implicitly, to "sort and slot" students for particular occupations, based upon measures of ability. (See for example, Hempel, 1986).

The origin of the American public secondary school stems from a concern on the part of the people that all youth have a chance to pursue secondary education at public expense. The chief problem of secondary school education, like that of public school education generally, has been this: What should be the subjects for study, if everyone may attend? The choice of subjects indicates the character of education that all youth receive, especially in terms of expectations for achievement in particular content areas.

Finally, in our public schools we offer an educational program to a multicultural society. This calls for a flexible organizational design for public schools and a public school curriculum that satisfies the varied and changing educational needs of all youth, but especially those who are from circumstances of economic and educational disadvantage. Such individuals have little or no appreciation for the opportunities our society makes available freely to all its citizens for self-improvement.

There is need for a diversified curriculum with emphasis on basic academic and occupational skills. Furthermore, an even more important concern should be the development of educational programs based upon the assumption that the mastery of specific basic skills is less important, relatively speaking, than development of an ability to learn and keep on learning. We need a curriculum for lifetime learning that is especially relevant to disadvantaged youth between the ages of 9 and 15 years old.

School/Community Efforts and the "At Risk" Student

Have the schools addressed in substantive ways the reasons why disadvantaged 9 - 15-year-old youth are "at risk" of dropping out of school? A number of reports have documented that the dropout problem has been raised in earlier investigations of schooling (Combs and Cooley, 1968; Hollingshead, 1949; and Levin, 1972). Current statistics remind us that this stubborn educational problem persists in the schools. Do officials of the schools find it improbable to conclude that the standard American curriculum does not adequately address the interests which significant numbers of children bring to their schools?

The usual approach that public schools take to handle the problem of early school leaving is to reinforce the standard curriculum. Schools treat potential, early leavers as remedial student cases: an "at risk" student must be reshaped for the policies and programs of the standard school. This practice assumes that, in the effort to deal with the dropout problem there is little or no need for substantive reform of the school. Youth "at risk" are the problem for themselves. The schools are fine. Granted, the descriptive characteristics presented earlier in this report of 9 - 15-year-old youth "at risk," indicate that some portion of the drop out problem originates with the youth themselves, but it is an error in logic as well as in fact to assume that the entire effect is due to the students' circumstances. In the discussion to follow there is an examination of the efforts by schools to deal with the dropout problem. First, we shall look briefly into the historical record of graduation and the legal basis for compulsory school attendance.

The 1980's is not the first decade during which students "dropped out" of high school. An examination of statistics on high school graduates recorded since the 1869-70 school year, shows that graduates from high school as a percentage of the 17-year-old population grew from a scant 2.0 percent in 1870 to what it is at today--approximately 75 percent (Digest of Education Statistics, 1987, p. 83). On the one hand, the record shows a dramatic improvement in the education of youth. On the other hand, the statistics bear witness to a stubborn fact, mentioned again and again in this report: a significant number of youth do not receive the full benefit of a free and public education--approximately 25 percent today. Who these youth are, as a group, was a particular concern that was addressed in earlier sections of this report. A related interest revolves around this question: Why do disadvantaged youths not complete the requirements for a high school diploma?

A variety of reasons explain the fact that more youth graduate from high school today than previously. A common sense reason is that the role of education in the life of a person has increased over the decades and youth recognize its benefits. There is some truth in this assertion, but it would be naive to attribute the entire effect to a deep seated, education ethic in this country. Two other important factors are the compulsory school attendance laws and the child labor laws.

By the 1930's the minimum age for leaving school and the minimum age for working a job had converged, legally, in most states on this number: 16 years old (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986, p. 13). Since then, the states have compelled students to attend school until the legal age for leaving and encouraged all to complete requirements for the high school diploma. To be precise, the official, legal basis for compulsory education is the common law doctrine of parens patriae, a term which means that the state is the guardian for minors or others. However, the compulsory school attendance and child labor laws established in more definitive ways the maximum term for youth to attend school in America.

This brief account of the legal provisions for schooling and the history of high school graduation as a percentage of 17-year-old youth, give rise to an important concern. If a public school education is available at no cost to every youth until the minimum age for leaving or graduation (the minimum age provision usually expires first), why do so many disadvantaged youth leave school before graduation? Do these youths not see the value in their future of pursuing at no expense a high school diploma? Or, in recognition of the tendency for all youth to focus on the present, do disadvantaged youth see little relevance in the educational program for their day-to-day lives?

It seems reasonable in this investigation to inquire further about the suitability of the curriculum for all youth, but particularly for those who are economically and educationally disadvantaged. It may be that, in the interest of educating all youth to the high school level of proficiency in subject matter, the public schools have offered a curriculum that does not satisfy the diverse interests represented in the millions of school age youth. From another viewpoint, we may find that the public school curriculum has become so standardized that it has little to offer particular segments of the population of youth, notably the disadvantaged.

School Policy in Support of the Standard Curriculum

The recommendations from the Chicago Panel for addressing the dropout problem fall into the category classified in the present report as Systematic Institutional Development. Their recommendations are similar to those proposed recently by the Massachusetts Advocacy Center and reviewed above (Wheelock, 1986). Policy recommendations, such as these, address immediately some important aspects of the dropout problem for 9 - 15-year-old disadvantaged youth, but defer until a later time the actual treatment of correlates and causes of early school leaving that stem from the formal organization of the school itself. Included are the following:

- Expand instructional time to 300 minutes by shifting to 50 minute periods.
- Restructure study halls to provide adequate academic opportunities or activity options, eliminating their use for gap filling.
- The school system must mount an attack on the "culture of cutting" which currently exists.
- Counseling services must be dramatically expanded and reorganized.
- Principals must focus attention on establishing orderliness in the schools, both in student discipline and in building maintenance.

- School staffs must focus on improving attendance and reducing failure rates.
- Principals must require more interactive instruction in the class and must work to reduce intrusive interruptions and student disruption.
- Improve staff development and evaluation efforts for high school administrative teams, especially for the principal.

A number of authorities for schools have expressed the opinion that policy changes suggested by the Chicago Panel and the Massachusetts Advocacy Center will provide effective treatment of the drop out problem for "at risk" youth. Their position may be summarized as follows: "Don't touch the school. One way or another, toughening of standards, holding teachers accountable, and enforcing rules will lead to lower dropout rates." There is merit to this position, but there is research which indicates that schools create "at risk" students by design.

A more honest appraisal of the school effect called "at risk" youth, is that the kind of tinkering and fine tuning of the existing school program, such as that suggested by the Chicago Panel, will merely encourage more "at risk" students to postpone dropping out and endure school for a while longer. Also, researchers and authorities for schools argue that these deferment policies are examples of the institution's inclination to avoid a critical examination of the organizational features of the school that contribute to production of a student life-style in the school known as "at risk." There is need for a more direct, innovative, and coordinated treatment by public schools and other local agencies of the causes and correlates of early school leaving among youth from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

Problems with the Standard Curriculum

Gary Wehlage (Turnbough, 1986, p. 9-10) summarizes the critical perspective on the schools in the following statement:

> Let's start by taking a look at the big picture of the comprehensive high school. The comprehensive high school is composed, in a certain sense, of a series of special programs for disparate kids, all with different interests and abilities. I suggested looking at the big picture deliberately because I'm looking now not only at narrow academic offerings, but all the other activities the school provides.
>
> Schools spend fairly large sums of money to build a gymnasium for 10-15 boys and girls to play varsity basketball. They build swimming pools for a few swimmers. They have bands and orchestras for a few kids. They make it possible for a few kids to act in plays or participate in speech and debate activities. Each group can be said to have an interest. That interest usually generates an institutional response in the form of a special program.
>
> The question is whether there indeed are vast numbers of kids who are not picked up by any of these alternatives.

> Looking only at academic programs, a comprehensive high school ought to possess and offer as many alternatives as possible to achieve minimum competency on the part of everyone and to push kids toward their maximum. Hopefully everyone is affected in some way or attracted to some program that meets his or her interests and needs. Of course this implies developing a program for at risk students, because their needs clearly aren't being met.

Two important points raised in the above quote are that: (1) schools have served the needs of students, but with a restricted vision of what is a good education and (2) authorities for these schools show a tendency to find satisfaction when only a relatively small number of students realize the benefits available in the school.

Wehlage calls attention to what actually goes on in schools. The comments he makes in regard to the limited nature of the school curriculum are even more disturbing when one considers that it is mostly the same students who enjoy the few available highlights of a typical secondary school curriculum (Cusick, 1973). High school graduation ceremonies offer ample opportunity to witness which students and how many derive important benefits from the public school program.

The latter point is noteworthy, because of the concern raised in this report for creating effective and meaningful instructional programs for "at risk" students, who are between the ages of 9 and 15 years. Generally speaking, to the extent that an instructional program for "at risk" students becomes specialized, effective, and meaningful, the very students for whom it is intended either voluntarily choose not to enroll or their eligibility for enrollment is discounted by school personnel because other, "more capable and more interested," students enroll.

These negative effects are due, at least in part, to the expectation on the part of students that schools characteristically offer a narrow and limited range of curricular and co-curricular programs. Competition for the most satisfying educational experiences results in a few winners and a great many losers. Losers, if they choose to compete at all for the few prizes in school, must be content to devote several years to remedial and developmental instructional programs. "At risk" students fall out among the losers. Among the dropouts are students who see the irony in the scheme and give up on the school. The 9 - 15-year-old disadvantaged students are among the losers and face even greater depths of dispair in their position.

Elementary teachers are aware that students form this perception of the hidden curriculum of the school (i.e., sorter and slotter) early in the primary grades (Goodlad, 1983). Many first, second, and third grade schoolteachers are disturbed by the extent to which this insight about the school program affects in negative ways the performance of otherwise capable students. The policy of tracking students--homogeneous grouping by achievement level--increases the amount of institutionally governed time that "at risk" students associate with one another and increases the physical and psychological distances between winners and losers in the school. According to Goodlad (1983, p. 158), once the student has passed through the primary grades, track placement is no longer an active institutional function, but a fact of life for students. A student's career in school is more or less set from the fourth grade on (9 years old) as a high, middle, low track child.

A rejoinder often provided by critics of school reform is that public schools are expensive institutions and, especially in times of relative scarcity, the public should be content with refinement of existing school programs (Catterall, 1986). The strategy proposed for this type of treatment of the "at risk" students has two phases.

First, provide assurance that the needs of the least advantaged members of society are being met, while maintaining the existing choices available to other students. Second, when satisfied that all needs are being met by the system, consider alternative forms of instructional programing. Apparently, it does not occur to proponents of this view that structural features that are characteristic of the "one best" system function tacitly to more or less guarantee that the schools will always have a "vast army of incapables" whose needs must be met. As a consequence, phase two of the plan remains on the shelf while the status quo perpetuates itself in phase one.

An assumption behind the development of comprehensive high schools is that the centralization of operations would lead to more efficient and cost-effective school programs. These results have not been realized, even though the number of school age youth has declined significantly in recent years (peek enrollment occurred in the mid 1970's). Bigger has not led to better, unless one defines better schooling as the creation of awkward and ineffective bureaucratic structures at the federal, state, and local levels. If anything, the concern for development of "bigger and better" schools has fed the competitive interests of politicians and school administrators. Some governors have based their political platforms on school reform issues. Superintendents have alerted their communities to the quality of their school system in terms of the dollars spent on pupils. There are vast discrepancies.

In the vicinity of Cleveland, Ohio, for instance, the difference between per pupil expenditures in the urban center and the highest public school district in a neighboring suburb was $6,000.00 at the start of the 1987-88 school year (Tutella, 1987). In the urban public school the taxpayers spent approximately $2,000.00 on each student. In the suburban school the public spent approximately $8,000.00 on each student. Discrepancies like these are common across urban and suburban areas within the states (cf., Digest of Education Statistics, 1987, p. 113).

It is instructive to view the curriculum of the school as influenced in important and negative ways by the athletic program of the school. Competition is a characteristic feature of athletic programs. There are intramural, extramural, regional, state, and national events. The object is to determine on an annual basis which school has the best team in baseball, basketball, football, soccer, swimming, track, and wrestling. Best is defined in terms of establishing a record of wins over losses in a tournament. Myths like "everyone wins, if a game is played well on both sides," help to keep the morale high among winners and losers. At least until the end of the game.

Districts develop elaborate programs stretching from kindergarten through twelfth grade to identify and train the most talented athletes in the school district. Varsity, junior varsity, and first, second, and third strings assure the coaches and influential members of the community that there is a sufficient number of capable recruits in training. The vast majority of students in schools take part in lackluster intramural games scheduled largely for the purpose of meeting the recreational needs of athletically untalented students.

The widespread interest expressed lately in special instructional programs for the "gifted and talented" (G&T) may be taken as one explicit example of how the curriculum of the school has taken on the auspices of the athletic program. Schools now prepare their G&T students for local, regional, and national competitions in Future Problem Solving, Mid-West Talent Search, and Olympics of the Mind.

The important point here is that schools offer a narrow curriculum, one that by design precludes the chances that schools will deal effectively with the needs and interests of the vast majority of students. Looking at the school curriculum through the lens offered by the athletic program helps to illustrate not only that the explicit school curriculum is narrow, but also that it serves an implicit function: to restrict access to the rewards of schooling to the students best suited to high academic achievement in college preparatory programs.

Teachers and principals need encouragement to present educational programs in public schools that offer truly different and non-discriminatory opportunities for education to youth, particularly to the 9 - 15-year-old disadvantaged youth. These programs must maintain very low teacher/student ratios, a curriculum that includes a blend of academic and occupational knowledge and skills, and vital connections with the business, industry, and social agencies of the local community. The true test of the effectiveness of such schools is in the satisfaction, educationally speaking, that such programs provide directly to disadvantaged youth and the hopes for improvement in the human condition that are realized by the parents of disadvantaged children.

Standard Curriculum versus Diversified Curriculum

This discussion on community/school efforts and the "at risk" youth supports conclusions drawn elsewhere in this and other reports (Olson, 1987, p.5). Namely, there is need for educators and policy makers to examine in more detail the nature of schooling before designing programs that have for their purpose to prevent disadvantaged youth from becoming "at risk" of dropping out of school. There is more influencing the disadvantaged students' decision to leave school early than accumulation of a record of low achievement. There is a complex interplay of social, economic, and educational factors that produce school dropouts among economically and educationally disadvantaged youth. As the following discussion will make clear, the efforts to meet the needs of disadvantaged youth with alternative schools may have hidden the problem more effectively than it has solved the problem.

One way of solving the problem of how to educate disadvantaged and disaffected youth gained popularity in the past decade and was called the "alternative school movement." These schools were located either in the public school or in a separate building, elsewhere in the community. They tended to attract potential or actual dropouts. The educational programs that are typical of alternative schools today, seem to work for certain students. Research indicates that students make gains, although there is still need of more evidence to show that the disadvantaged student's achievement in basic skills has improved significantly (Raywind, 1984).

Some specialized instructional programs that are offered within the standard school program tend to attract and keep high achieving students--the same high achieving students who participate in all of the other highly popular programs in the school (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986). Indeed, some alternative programs are contingent to some extent upon using the same strategies and structures that make schools maintain the standard curriculum, notably the athletic program. If public schools are to serve in more effective ways the broad range of interests represented in the public school student population, there must be a different form of school design (Buttenwieser, 1985). One quasi-alternative within the standard school curriculum does not make a diversified curriculum.

This researcher questions the hidden effects on students and the intentions of school districts in offering an "alternative" to the "real" public school. Does the designation of "alternative school" imply inferior status within the public school system? If the public school system consists of a diverse array of equally attractive "alternatives" that are chosen freely by students whose parents hold vouchers, there would be no stigma attached to one alternative. All schools would be alternatives. Ineffective schools would disappear because of a lack of direct public support. The local public school system would offer its community a diversified curriculum, that was managed by teachers and principals working more or less autonomously in the different, nonconsolidated schools. In the place of an alternative there would be schools of choice throughout the district.

It is important to separate out the interest in alternative schools from the issue of schools of choice. As the discussion above suggests, an alternative school may not be different, in a substantive way, from the standard school, in terms of its curriculum or its overall effectiveness. It may simply present a scaled down, standard program of the consolidated district, at a different location. Schools of choice give the youth and their parents the opportunity to show their support and approval of an educational program that is designed with the interests of the local community in mind. Schools of choice encourage teachers and administrators of schools to make good on their promise to offer an effective variety of educational programming for all youth in the community.

As Wehlage (1986, pp. 9-10) made clear, the limited nature of typical school curricula and the restricted design of school programs make it unlikely that schools, in their present form, will be able to serve the educational needs of the public in a meaningful and valuable way. Including a special program, like the Foxfire program in Georgia, for instance, makes an important addition to the regular school program. However, by itself, Foxfire is a sideline of the co-curricular program supporting college bound youth and not representative of a school-wide attempt to offer a line of courses dealing effectively with the broad range of needs and interests among disadvantaged youth in the community (Giles, 1985).

Athletic programs work for certain students. The same is true for theater and music. Proliferation of these standard school programs creates the impression that schools offer a diversified curriculum to students, when, in reality, they subscribe to a narrow set of values relevant to college bound students. This is one powerful reason explaining the "at risk" student's negative attitude toward school and self, low achievement record, and tendency to drop out of school.

The major point of this discussion is as follows. Given the demographic characteristics of "at risk" youth, aged 9 - 15, it is difficult to imagine that many individuals who are economically and educationally disadvantaged will recognize an honest effort in the school's promise of rewards for staying in school. When getting an education demands near total subscription to the values of the "college bound," a large number of youth face denial of opportunities by definition and by design. Officials for the schools need to recognize the important role they play in the provision of support to disadvantaged youth, particularly those between the ages of 9 - 15 years.

To sum up, there is an urgent need for educators and policy makers to redefine the purpose of schooling. In their current form, the public schools are pushing disadvantaged students out of narrow and restricted educational programs. A characteristic of the "at risk" youth is a vague awareness that the public school does not offer a meaningful education for everyone. The public school needs to offer a balanced and integrated curriculum, a program of studies that respects both academic and occupational interests, so that there is an immediate and satisfying appeal for all children in the varied career and vocational or technical pursuits of modern life.

Public policy needs to promote development of new designs for school structures. There is also need of innovative curriculum designs. All of the above needs are critically dependent upon the knowledge and skill of professional educators. Therefore, an essential need for the improvement of education in this country is for public policy to empower teachers as the primary agents in the schooling of youth. These teachers should be encouraged or required to work with other agencies in the local community to provide the educational benefits to disadvantaged youth in direct and beneficial ways.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this report was to investigate the ways in which the process of education works to produce youth "at risk," between ages 9 - 15. Although these effects attributable to the design of the schools are unintentional, they are nonetheless deserving of attention. It is encouraging to note that approximately 75 percent of the youth in the United States graduate from high school. It is disappointing to observe in this statistic that nearly 25 percent of the youth of this nation do not complete the requirements for a high school diploma. These results present a discouraging note for the future: a post-industrial society for the twenty-first century may have a significant number of its citizens who are unlearned, incompetent with basic skills for study and work, and unable to participate in the work force or the political life of this nation.

One explanation for the high incidence of "at risk" youth between the ages of 9 and 15 is that the students who eventually drop out are not capable of academic achievement that merits a high school diploma. The present report denies the relevance of blaming 9 - 15-year-old children for their achievement results in school. A second, more plausible explanation is that the effects of schooling result from the complex interplay of various forces that unfold as a matter of course in the life of a school. Some of the forces, such as student subcultures, are located within the school and others, like tax levies, are located outside of the school. The problem of 9 - 15-year-old youth "at risk" deserves attention from policy makers, educators, and legislatures. A primary concern in this report has been the extent to which existing school policy and practice influence a child's decision to adopt perceptions and behaviors that promote early school leaving.

This report has found that policy and practice at the local and state level have encouraged development of a standardized school curriculum, one that offers narrow and restricted opportunities for disadvantaged children to realize the benefits of an education. The primary purpose of the public school curriculum has been to promote attendance in college. There is no argument in this report to discredit such a goal for youth. Reports indicate that the college preparatory programs attract students, especially the college bound, but persistence of the standardized curriculum (including college preparatory courses) has led to a substantial amount of dissatisfaction with schooling among all youth.

A public school education needs to represent a broader range of values than those encompassed in the narrowly conceived and routinely operated American curriculum of today. It is imperative that public policy create opportunities for educators to design schools and to implement school curricula that enable this nation to get beyond the malaise in public schooling caused by an institutional bias for stability. To the extent that public policy directs itself toward genuine reform, the people of this nation will enjoy the benefits of a pluralistic culture for the American dream.

In the next section of this report are brief descriptions of three courses of action called: business as usual, systematic institutional development, and reform of the school. Two are common to the schools of today. The third is an opportunity for policy makers, legislatures, and educators to work together on the problem of schooling for American society in the twenty-first century. The concluding section provides recommendations for policy changes.

Business as Usual

Many schools across the nation maintain a sense of security about the design and operation of their schools. "Problems?" We have none," they say. Last year it was the gifted and talented programs. In the previous year the problem was a lack of instructional programming for the handicapped. The barometer of schools today is the dropout problem. If a district's dropout rate is not higher than, say 5 percent, there is no need to create special programs to prevent students from leaving school early.

There is also little reason to consider the appeals nationally for reorganization of the schools. Whatever dissatisfaction may be evident from the complaints of students, it is to be expected whenever dealing with children and adolescents. Teachers maintain order in their classrooms and principals handle the school budget and disciplinary problems. School keeps in places like this. The program for the twenty-first century is called business as usual. There is an explicit subscription to the status quo in public school education.

Systematic Institutional Development

There are many school districts (notably those in large urban centers and poor rural areas) where the dropout problem has reached what is called an "epidemic proportion." More than 50 percent of the youth enrolled in the freshman year of high school leave school before completing requirements for graduation. The most common approach to dealing with high rates of dropouts is to toughen standards, to expand remedial programs, and to enforce the rules for school attendance.

At the state and local levels these "changes" in policy and practice reinforce established organizational structures for the operation of schools. These are good faith efforts that are intended to reduce the occurrence of a curious effect of the school known as youth "at risk." The latter are children aged 9 - 15 who develop perceptions and behaviors that are dysfunctional for schooling. Although it is too early to assess the results of systematic institutional development, it is nonetheless clear that this strategy supports the status quo in explicit and implicit ways.

Reform of the School

The teacher is the professional who is in a position to influence in substantive ways the quality of education that youth receive. The reform of schools for development of effective and democratic educational programs for the twenty-first century rests upon the transference to the teacher of responsibility for making decisions about what should be the content of an educational program and how the program should operate.

This proposal calls for a dismantling of legislation, policy and practice that has prevented the educators at all levels of educational programming (nursery school through graduate school) from exercising their professional responsibilities. Legislation, policy, and practice that empowers educators must be substituted for the legal and institutional structures that establish and promote further development of bureaucratic agencies and processes that prevent the development of effective and innovative educational programs.

Specifically, this proposal argues that schools be places where teachers work with children for the purpose of passing on to them the cultural heritage. In doing so the teacher imparts knowledge and skills that enable all youth to participate in the economic, political, and social aspects of this nation in meaningful and productive ways. Schools for teachers and children are not places where masses of youth are processed in batches of 25 - 32 according to a block schedule and subjected to routine methods and materials for instruction.

Teachers who are certified by the state in which they work for the public education of children must be given charters to establish neighborhood schools or academies. These public schools would have open enrollment policies with upper limits to provide assurance that the educational program is not adversely affected by the crowd effect (e.g., 100 - 200 students). Wherever possible these operations can take place in buildings constructed for the purpose of public schooling. Where no such facilities exist, a suitable existing building will suffice.

In these new schools the professional educators will have responsibility for establishing and maintaining effective instructional programs that serve in the best way possible the educational needs and interests of youth. Supervision of the educators' work will be the responsibility of the state within which the teachers conduct school for the public. The role of the community in the affairs of the local school continues, but is redefined in view of the professional educator's responsibility for making decisions about how to teach children in the public school.

Conclusion

How much different would be our perceptions of the treatment variables for youth "at risk," if programs for schooling took place in a variety of settings and offered truly different curriculum designs? It strikes this reviewer as curious that the work done nationally to prevent early school leaving, like that for other aspects of instructional programming, has been to promote continuance of the "one best" system. The logical conclusion for such a single-minded pursuit of "excellence in education" is that one of these two results will follow: all systems succeed or all systems fail. Fortunately, it is only on rare occasions that logic carries so much predictive power. The most likely, actual result is that mediocrity will prevail, as it has historically.

Subscription to the "one best" way means, quite simply, that public schools will continue to operate as they have. Public school education has been construed somehow to mean standardized education. Curriculum thinking in America reduces itself to the belief that instructional programs in one place must be like those in another place. American curriculum has not changed over time, if by change is meant a radical transformation of practice. Instead, there has been a slow, but definitive accretion of policy and practice in support of standardized education.

This is not an argument in support of radical change in educational programming for public schools. The argument here is for creating a provision for diversity in the organizational, structural, and programmatic features of schools. The proposed effort, while not radical, is nonetheless ambitious. It requires a large scale reorganization of educational programming at state and local levels.

Reform of the schools requires that people develop a new perspective on the form and content of public schools. The most important feature of this proposal for dealing with youth "at risk," between the ages of 9 - 15, is the empowerment of educators to design and implement educational programs that give students a solid background in a core curriculum and real choices for exploring personal interests for a lifetime of participation in this democratic republic.

General Recommendations

This report recommends that the United States government adopt a comprehensive plan for increasing the likelihood that disadvantaged youth, 9-15 years old, will become economically productive and socially responsible adults. In more specific terms:

A. Public policy should establish as a top priority for the nation the improvement of life circumstances for children and young adolescents, so that their physical, emotional, and psychological development throughout childhood produces a healthy and productive society of adults for the future of this nation.

B. The federal government should assume a leadership role in the design and implementation of a national program to provide a comprehensive service for assistance and remediation of youth "at risk" through an integrated and cooperative network of agencies operating at the local, state, and national levels.

C. Resources of the federal government should be designated for the specific purpose of providing academic, career, and vocational/technical programs that serve the needs of economically and educationally disadvantaged youth who are between 9 and 15 years old.

D. The major objective of the federal support for the educational and occupational needs of 9 - 15 year old youth "at risk" is to provide assurance to the public that all children will have the opportunity to develop the attitudes toward work, perceptions of self and others, and basic skills for lifelong learning and work that are necessary prerequisites to productive and meaningful participation in the work force of this nation.

Principles of a Policy for Youth "At Risk"

On the basis of the research conducted for this report, a new set of policies regarding the educational and employment training programs for 9 - 15 year old youth should respect the following principles:

A. The difficulties encountered and endured by 9 - 15-year-old youth "at risk," that often lead to dropping out of school, should be viewed as a social and cultural process problem that deserves immediate attention and requires long-term planning. Despite the nature and origin of this problem, the solution lies in the institution of innovative and systematic programs for the explicit purpose of transforming the disadvantaged youth of today into educated and employable adults of tomorrow.

B. The establishment of policy and practice for remediating the lifelong educational and occupational needs of disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15, must be placed high on the nation's agenda. A person's development of attitudes, perceptions, and skills associated with work occurs long before legal entry into the work force at 16 years of age. The youth who drop out of school today and attempt to enter the work force without the necessary prerequisites, do so at great risk of experiencing cyclical unemployment problems.

C. This nation should mandate that all children, but especially the disadvantaged, receive, at the very minimum, adequate attention to personal needs in the areas of physical and emotional health, social and psychological development, basic skills in academic, career, and vocational or technical interests. The security and prosperity of this nation depends entirely upon having a healthy, balanced, educated, and productive citizenry. It can not afford to generate an underclass of disadvantaged, helpless people.

D. The youth who are "at risk" must be encouraged to view success in life as the active pursuit of personal goals in accordance with real social needs and that the rewards or benefits will vary in type and will accumulate over time, but depend to a great extent upon the individual having a healthy sense of self and the competence to complete work in a satisfactory and timely manner. In particular, disadvantaged youth must be given the sense of personal value, commitment, and determination that makes it possible for anyone to participate in the educational, economic, and political life of this nation.

E. Educational, social welfare agencies, business, and industry must operate through a coordinated network of programs at the local level that responds with immediacy and comprehensiveness to the needs of individual disadvantaged children whose families suffer serious hardships and tragedies and to the needs of neighborhoods or communities that have a history of physical, economic, and social deterioration. These programs should be designed, as far as possible, to promote among the individuals who receive assistance the competence in basic academic and work-related skills for eventual employment.

F. Our nation must create ladders of opportunity that demonstrate convincing and unequivocal evidence to disadvantaged children that any individual who achieves at least a satisfactory level of competence with basic academic and work-related skills can enter the job market and pursue an occupational interest or career. At the local level there is a need to design versatile work structures for employment, marketing arrangements and partnerships with schools, active race and sex role models, work site visits, and, not the least, a differentiated school curriculum that begins minimally with the fourth grade. The federal government should establish appropriate expenditure, tax, and regulatory powers to assure the public that these principles will be realized in the lives of today's children.

Specific Recommendations

This researcher believes that the specific recommendations to follow, which are macro-structural in orientation, would respect these principles:

A. To restructure public elementary and secondary schools:

(1) Public policy should support new funding for the design, development, and accreditation of public elementary and secondary schools that are nonconsolidated, small, and responsive to the particular and varied needs of disadvantaged youth. In so doing the government should stipulate that state certified teachers, specialists, and administrators have the authority to establish and operate schools that maintain a low student/teacher ratio and provide appropriate space, adequate facilities, and sufficient tools and materials for offering an effective, high quality, differentiated curriculum to youth who come from circumstances of economic and educational disadvantage.

(2) Public policy should stipulate that the states adopt a voucher plan to create a just program of public--and only public--schooling in the nation that is based upon direct, parental support of local public schools. The plan would exist to promote an equitable distribution of federal and state funds for per/pupil expenditures for public education, would allow parents to choose the public school for their child to attend in the local district, and would provide allowances for the extent of emphasis needed by the child in different aspects of the regular, advanced, remedial, and special curricula.

The institution of the voucher plan must be viewed as a mechanism to encourage and support further development of effective, existing public schools and programs, to suspend ineffective systems of education, and to promote the design and development of innovative and effective schools and school programs for the public education of all youth, but especially those classified as "at risk."

The schools must be permitted and encouraged to report the results of their work with disadvantaged children in terms of autobiographical accounts, historical reports, and ethnographic or observational studies, as well as statistical reports.

B. To design and implement a differentiated public school curriculum:

(3) Under the provisions of Chapter 2 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981, special resources should be made available for the development of a public school curriculum, beginning with the fourth grade, that maintains an up-to-date educational program, with balance and harmony between the various aspects of both academic and career, vocational and technical areas of subject matter. These funds should be used for support to experts and specialized personnel in education and related fields to design and implement an innovative and appealing, differentiated public school curriculum. The result should be a coordinated and non-tracked, broad fields approach to development of knowledge and skills for both academic and occupational interests, particularly for disadvantaged youth who are 9 - 15-years-old.

These resources should also support research related to the development of policy and practice of a differentiated curriculum, for promoting the documentation and dissemination of results from local programs and studies of a differentiated curriculum, and for the evaluation of programs designed to promote the combined achievement of academic and occupational skills among "at risk" youth between the ages of 9 and 15.

C. To improve competencies in basic skills:

(4) Public policy should establish or identify new resources for the support of research and development of instructional programs targeted specifically for the promotion of achievement in basic academic and work-related skills among disadvantaged youth. This research and development effort would place special emphasis on the implications of social and cultural processes for academic achievement and occupational pursuits among disadvantaged youth, age 9 - 15.

(5) Public policy should allocate new resources for the development of extra-school educational programs that improve the achievement of disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15, in basic academic and occupational skills. These funds should be used to support special tutors, in-service training of teachers, intensive evaluation, before and after school programs for "latch-key" children, and visits by role models.

(6) Teachers and administrators for the schools must be required or provided with incentives to maintain the same high standards of achievement for all youth in the schools, should design programs that effectively encourage disadvantaged children to attend school regularly and strive for gains in achievement, and should provide a comprehensive form of support to youth "at risk" for their development of competence with academic and work-related basic skills. Teachers and administrators for the public schools should receive

encouragement to promote an appreciation among disadvantaged youth for the intrinsic rewards of an education. Children who show unsatisfactory achievement, should be given a second chance opportunity, whenever possible.

(7) To encourage partnerships between the school and the local community, teachers and administrators should be encouraged or required to hire people at the minimum wage or to solicit volunteers, who are responsible and adequately skilled adults, to serve as classroom aides for the performance of non-instructional tasks, assistance with maintenance of appropriate classroom order, and preparation or distribution of instructional materials.

D. To provide occupation and career orientation programs in schools:

(8) Public policy should encourage or require public school teachers and administrators and representatives from the other professions, business, and industry to collaborate their efforts to determine the basic academic and occupational skills required for effective and long-term participation in the work force of the local community and to include these in the curriculum of the school.

(9) That teachers and administrators of local school districts be required to develop and implement research-based occupation and career orientation programs for disadvantaged youth, age 9 - 15.

(10) The public schools must be encouraged to develop partnerships with the professions, business, and industry so that the school's curriculum for occupations and career orientation includes the resources available from the economic base of the local community.

E. To establish networks of educational and social welfare programs:

(11) That public policy encourage the collaboration of various agencies to operate a consolidated and effective network of services for the health, education, and welfare of disadvantaged youth, aged 9 - 15.

(12) Public policy should establish that an appropriate authority at the local level be given the responsibility for identification of all 9 - 15-year-old children who come from family situations that represent cases of abuse, neglect, poverty, or personal tragedy and must have authority to determine the nature and extent of all services which are needed to provide appropriate care and would lead to improvement in the child's health, academic achievement, and employability.

(13) Public policy should encourage or require that local public schools offer educational programs targeted toward improvement of the basic academic and occupational skills of both children and parents, in order to establish a support system for promoting the achievement of disadvantaged children in their home environment and to stop family histories of illiteracy and unemployment. These inter-generational models of educational programs should not only include disadvantaged pre-school children, but also the 9 - 15-year-old "at risk" youth.

(14) Public school programs at the local level should include programs which educate and train teenage mothers in the care and feeding of their children, avoidance of pregnancy, and development of basic academic and work-related skills for successful completion of their public school education and eventual employment.

F. To broaden opportunities for disadvantaged youth to obtain regular jobs:

(15) Incentives should be provided to employers to encourage their participation in a school-based program to adopt 9 - 15 year-old disadvantaged youth on an individual basis, for the purpose of instilling in these youth "at risk" an appreciation for the academic and occupational concerns of the school, ensuring the availability of an entry level job upon graduation from high school, and providing a possibility for pursuit of a career.

(16) Public policy should provide incentives to encourage or require that employers in the service-related industries provide their employees with constructive, useful, and valued amenities in order to make life in the work place an attractive and rewarding personal experience, despite the fact that the salaries and wages for personnel in these jobs will most likely remain lower than in other forms of employment. Parents who work in these industries and whose children are classified as youth "at risk" should receive assistance with efforts to instill in their children a respect for work and an acceptance of the values appropriate for a lifetime commitment to productive employment to meet personal needs and social obligations.

Public policy should insure that disadvantaged youth, whose futures could involve long-term or lifetime careers in the service occupations, develop an appreciation at an early age of the importance of all work to the national economy and of the potential value that social and occupational amenities have for workers.

(17) Officials of the public schools should be required to provide convincing evidence that the achievement in basic academic and occupational skills of all disadvantaged children, aged 9 - 15, is in agreement with their ability. There should be a stipulation that the public school's receipt of all federal funds be contingent upon the school's demonstration of an effective program for disadvantaged youth who are enrolled in the school.

G. To promote interest in lifelong learning among disadvantaged youth:

(18) Public policy should encourage leaders in business and industry, in research, in legal and medical professions, and in education to establish and maintain programs at the level of the local community, that enable "at risk" youth age 9 - 15 to recognize, experience, and appreciate the importance of learning for a lifetime of personal satisfaction and responsible citizenship.

(19) That public policy should direct social welfare agencies to remove children from parents or guardians with home circumstances that are characterized by physical or sexual abuse, severe alcoholism and drug abuse, and neglect or absenteeism. The removal and return of these children to their

parents should be contingent upon the provision of effective treatment to the parents for the remediation of their dysfunctional or oppositional behavior.

Finally, to insure that long-term cumulative progress is realized in regard to the employability of disadvantaged youth, the Commission recommends that:

(20) Public policy have a mechanism to provide for review, preferably, on an annual basis, of the extent to which the health, education, and employment prospects for disadvantaged youth, age 9 - 15, have improved as a result of these measures. On the basis of the review, Congress should take any necessary corrective action to insure continued achievement of genuine progress concerning the social and economic welfare of disadvantaged children. The intolerable circumstances endured by disadvantaged youth today must fade rapidly for them into healthy, productive lives that are filled with learning and opportunity from childhood through adulthood.

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APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS

The Concept of Youth "At Risk"

The youth between the ages of 9 - 15 are not yet old enough to enter the world of work, but are capable of demonstrating competence in a wide variety of academic and occupational interests. These youths comprise a large group of school age students about whom little is known and for whom few programs exist that offer assistance. The term "youth 'at risk'" is used to refer to educationally and economically disadvantaged sub-populations among the 9 - 15 year old youth, whose circumstances promote early school leaving. Stated differently, these disadvantaged youth are "at risk" of dropping out of school.

Definitions

Experts have coined a variety of terms to describe different features of social problem addressed in this report. For the sake of clarity, the author will use only the following terms and their definitions.

At Risk

The public as well as authorities for the schools now acknowledge that informative symptoms about early school leaving occur at periods early in the student's schooling experience. Students who exhibit these signals are called "at risk." The Massachusetts Advocacy Center provides the following definition: an "at risk" student is one who is: exposed to experiences which make students candidates for early school leaving" (See Wheelock, 1986, p. 14). Characteristics of the early school leaver are: record of absence from school 15 percent or more of their time enrolled in school, designation of non-promotion at least once in middle school, record of achievement two or more years behind age-appropriate grade level, record of suspension at least once per year.

Completer

A student who is a "completer" finishes formal schooling and receives a high school diploma or its equivalent (Pallas, 1986, pp. 158-161).

Dropin

This term designates a student who dropped out of school once, but at some point later drops back in. A characteristic pattern of the "dropin" is dropping out and dropping back in repeatedly (Pallas, 1986, pp. 158-161).

Dropout

When a student is absent from school for an extended period of time without official sanction, the term "dropout" is used to classify the individual. Many schools maintain records of dropouts and the rates at which students drop out of school. A clear definition and standard policy are necessary for accurate recording of such data. The Center for Dropout Prevention at the University of Miami has recommended to the Florida legislature the following definition of a school dropout: "A student who (for any reason other than death) leaves school before graduation without transferring to another school/institution" (Center for Dropout Prevention, 1986, p. 81)

Pushout

It is a common understanding that the experience with learning that a student has in school explains to a great extent whether or not the individual will quit school early. In other words, what schools do in the name of education may promote learning in school or detract from it. Recognizing the burden that school's bear in the effort to educate youth, Dale Mann offers the following definition: a "pushout" is a student that our "schools failed to teach" (Mann, 1987, p. 5).

Returnee

Students who return to school after dropping out receive the classification of "returnee" (or "stopin") (See Pallas, 1986, pp. 158-161). Some of these students drop out again and never complete a high school diploma or its equivalent. Other "returnees" finish high school and receive a diploma or an alternative credential.

Stayout

The term "stayout" refers to a student who drops out of school and does not return for a regular high school diploma or an alternative credential (See Pallas, 1986, pp. 158-161).

Stopout

Some students return to school after dropping out. Research indicates that a significant number of these individuals (90 percent) continue with post-secondary education (See Morgan, 1984). The term "stopout" is used to refer to students who quit school but eventually "drop back in" (See Mann, 1987, p. 11). Another term for this phenomenon is "returnee."

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